

European Meeting  
Safety & Security  
PAGE 22

Beach Resorts &  
Floating Venues  
PAGE 28

The Latest and  
Greatest Tech Tools  
PAGE 36

Building  
Relationships  
PAGE 42

Meeting in the  
Big Easy  
PAGE 48

Sunshine State  
Meetings  
PAGE 54

A COASTAL COMMUNICATIONS CORPORATION PUBLICATION

JUNE 2017 VOL. 35 NO. 6 \$12.00

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# CORPORATE & INCENTIVE TRAVEL

THE MAGAZINE FOR CORPORATE MEETING AND INCENTIVE TRAVEL PLANNERS

## Golf & Spa Resorts

Planners Rate Select Properties  
PAGE 14

**CLICK HERE TO  
DOWNLOAD/VIEW  
TABLET VERSION**

Joy Demme is Director of National Meetings at RSM US, the title sponsor for The RSM Classic, held on Sea Island Resort's Seaside (pictured) and Plantation golf courses.

Credit: Sea Island Resort





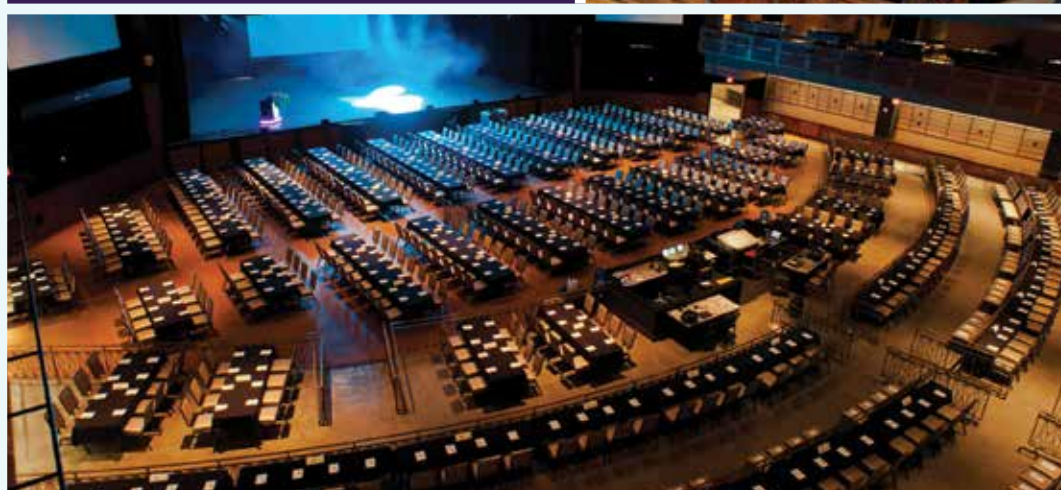
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## In This Issue

VOLUME 35 NO. 6

JUNE 2017

### FEATURES

- 14 Golf & Spa Resorts**  
A Score Card on Select Properties From the Planner Point of View  
By Christine Loomis
- 22 The European Dilemma**  
How Growing Safety and Security Concerns Are Impacting Overseas Site Selection  
By John Buchanan
- 28 Meet at the Beach**  
A Welcome Break From the Ordinary  
By Sophia Bennett
- 36 The Latest and Greatest Tech Tools**  
'Understanding Technology Diminishes Fear of It'  
By Derek Reveron
- 42 Building Relationships**  
Bringing People Together Is Vital to Business Success  
By Maura Keller

### DESTINATIONS

- 48 New Orleans**  
From the Culinary & Music Scenes to its Cultural Heritage, the Crescent City Delivers Inspirational & Memorable Meetings  
By David Swanson
- 54 Florida**  
The Sunshine State Checks All the Boxes That Planners and Attendees Want and Need  
By Derek Reveron

### DEPARTMENTS

- 4 Publisher's Message**
- 6 News & Notes**
- 7 Tips & Trends**
- 9 Snapshots**
- 10 Perspective**  
Mobile Apps Aren't the Future of Event Planning, They're the Present  
By Sam Smith
- 66 People on the Move**
- 66 Reader Services**



Safety and security are of great concern in Europe especially at airports, hotels, restaurants, malls and more. **PAGE 22**



A beachside event at Renaissance Aruba Resort & Casino, which offers more than 40,000 sf of total event space. **PAGE 28**



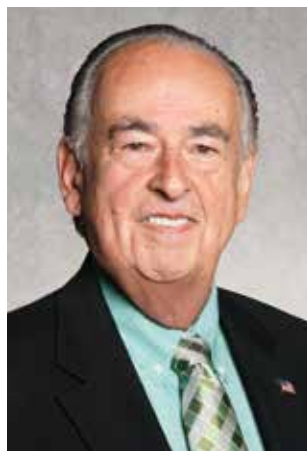
Magnificent views abound at the Sanibel Harbour Marriott Resort & Spa near Fort Myers, Florida. **PAGE 54**



# Publisher's Message

## From the Planner Point of View

The guiding mission of our meeting magazines is to present enlightening and informative stories from the "Planner Point of View." Ever since the founding of *Corporate & Incentive Travel* magazine in September 1983, our focus has been on the special needs of the corporate meeting and incentive travel planner professional. In our premiere issue, I wrote, "It is the aim of *Corporate & Incentive Travel* to help planners make their sometimes complex planning decisions more easily." Our



mission remains the same today: To provide a compelling package of news, in-depth features and destination reports, meeting planning basics and viewpoints from meeting planners and industry experts.

Thus, in this issue we bring you on page 14 a fabulous cover story "Golf & Spa Resorts — A Score Card on Select Properties From the Planner Point of View." Joy Demme, the director of national meetings at RSM US LLP, graces our cover in front of the legendary Sea Island Resort on the Georgia coast — the site of the RSM Classic, a PGA Tour event held on the resort's Seaside and Plantation courses. Demme says, "Sea Island Resort aligns very well with our firm and our brand. At RSM we value excellence, team-

work, respect, integrity and stewardship, and these are all attributes that Sea Island values as well."

Sea Island Resort's iconic sister property, The Broadmoor, in Colorado Springs, also is well-known for its magnificent setting and championship golf courses. Sasha Samuel, coordinator of the Messenger Cup held there, says The Broadmoor is ideal for this event as it "is a five-star, five-diamond resort that can properly host our VIPs during the event. The lodging options provide a wide variety of suites for our group as well."

For more solid points of view from planners, don't miss the New Orleans report on page 48, and the latest and best news from the Sunshine State on page 54. In addition, on page 22 experts advise planners how to manage safety and security concerns in Europe, and planners share pointers on how best to "Meet at the Beach" on page 28. Also, on page 42 we thoroughly address how to bring people together to build relationships. Last but not least, we bring you tech updates: on page 10 a guest column advises on the use of mobile apps, and on page 36 news about the latest and greatest tech tools with this noteworthy caveat — "Understanding technology diminishes fear of it."

Harvey Grotsky  
Publisher

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## News & Notes

### Carnival Cruise Line and Long Beach Start Renovations at Cruise Terminal



City of Long Beach Mayor Robert Garcia and Carnival Cruise Line Vice President Strategic and Commercial Port Development Carlos Torres de Navarra at the "FUNstruction" groundbreaking ceremony.

LONG BEACH, CA — Carnival Cruise Line recently marked the beginning of a multimillion-dollar renovation of its Long Beach Cruise Terminal facility to accommodate larger ships and enhance terminal operations. The renovation will increase the space Carnival currently occupies from approximately 66,000 sf to 142,000 sf. The expansion and new design will allow for a dramatically enhanced passenger experience and operational flow

[www.carnival.com](http://www.carnival.com)

### Flamingo Las Vegas to Undergo Rooms Renovation

LAS VEGAS, NV — Caesars Entertainment will be launching a \$90 million complete renovation of 1,270 rooms at Flamingo Las Vegas. The renovation will begin in late August 2017, with the first guest arrivals expected in November 2017, and final completion of all rooms expected in the second quarter of 2018. The fully renovated rooms will feature unique, contemporary and retro-chic designs with accents that celebrate Flamingo's rich history as the centerpiece of the Las Vegas Strip. The rooms were inspired to sparkle like glitter and shine like champagne, with vibrant hues of gold and bright pops of flamingo pink,



A renovated guest room at Flamingo Las Vegas.

keeping true to the property's character and charisma.

Located in the heart of the Las Vegas Strip, Flamingo Las Vegas

### Westin Grand Cayman Nears Renovation Debut

GRAND CAYMAN, CAYMAN ISLANDS — The Westin Grand Cayman Seven Mile Beach Resort & Spa is putting the finishing touches on the second phase of a property-wide renovation that will debut distinctive enhancements to all guest rooms and suites and adjacent corridors.

The second phase of the \$50 million project, which wraps up in September 2017, will be completed in time for travelers to enjoy the peak 2017–2018 Caribbean travel season. All of Westin Grand Cayman's 343 accommodations received a floor-to-ceiling transformation with colors, textures and materials inspired by the surrounding environment.

The award-winning resort occupies eight acres along the famed Seven Mile Beach and boasts more than 9,000 sf of indoor and 40,000 sf of outdoor event space.

[www.westingrandcayman.com](http://www.westingrandcayman.com)

### New IRF Report: Neuroscience and Employee Engagement

MCLEAN, VA — The Incentive Research Foundation released "Using Behavioral Economics Insights



VAN DYKE

in Incentives, Rewards and Recognition: The Neuroscience," an innovative application of scientific findings to employee motivation and rewards. The report explains how behavioral economics can help employers better understand what motivates employees, because it recognizes the majority of human decision-making is emotional as opposed to rational. Behavioral economics integrates social, cognitive and emotional factors to more fully explain human decision-making biases. Neuroeconomics provides an additional powerful layer of proof by exploring the biologic underpinnings of decision-making. Technological advances, such as brain-imaging technology, enable researchers to probe the brain in unprecedented detail.

"From studies on oxytocin to dopamine to the prefrontal cortex, there is no shortage of emerging neuroeconomics research on what makes humans tick," said Melissa Van Dyke, IRF president. "Using Behavioral Economics Insights in Incentives, Rewards, and Recognition: The Neuroscience" curates and explains the research so that incentives, rewards and recognition professionals can use this knowledge to better understand what motivates employees and ultimately create more engaging and productive work environments."

The most powerful neuroeconomics finding is that all forms of reward are processed in the brain's master reward center, the striatum, and are experienced as rewarding feelings.

To download the full study, go to the website. [www.theirf.org](http://www.theirf.org)

## Tips & Trends

### Safety Tips for Business Travelers

Life as a business traveler isn't always easy. A recent study by SRI underlines some of the negative impacts of frequent business travel, including long check-in lines, flight delays and lonely dinners. Egencia, the corporate travel division of the Expedia group based in Bellevue, Washington, developed these tips for business travelers and travel managers to help ensure business travel is as stress-free and safe as possible.

1. Always leave a copy of your itinerary with your travel manager or colleagues. Technology allowing 1:1 digital communication between employees and travel managers or HR is in development, but in the meantime, Facebook offers the ability to mark yourself safe in areas affected by emergencies.
2. For your flight, wear clothing that enables a quick exit in case of an emergency — no heels or skirts.
3. At your hotel, if someone comes to your door, call the front desk to verify the sender and use the additional door lock at night.
4. In general, always be aware of your surroundings when you are in new places — stay in populated, well-lighted areas.
5. Before leaving for an international trip, register with the U.S. State Department website and sign up to receive travel alerts.
6. Make sure your cellphone is approved for international roaming and program local emergency numbers into your contacts.
7. Save a digital copy or photo of your passport in your phone, or email it to yourself.
8. Consider signing up for travel insurance that includes medical evacuation.
9. Contact your local embassy and loved ones if there is an emergency in the area where you are visiting.
10. Check flight status before heading to the airport to avoid unnecessary wait or delay time at the gate.
11. Seat maps open up 24 hours prior to departure — check to make sure you have a seat and potentially snag a better seat since additional ones may have been released.
12. Pack healthy snacks for your flight and beyond. Protein bars, almonds and a supply of vitamins will benefit you when you're faced with long lines and few healthful food options.
13. Stay hydrated! If you don't want to splurge for airport bottled water, bring a personal water bottle and fill it up once you're through security.
14. Avoid alcohol and caffeine. Both can be tempting on a long flight but they contribute to dehydration and increase your likelihood of jet lag.
15. Look for fitness offerings at hotels — beyond the gym, many now offer classes, running maps and loan out gym clothes or shoes.
16. Meditate to keep stress at bay; apps can remind you to focus and breathe.

— Phoebe Schultz, Egencia

[www.egencia.com](http://www.egencia.com)



## SITE Community Loses Jane E. Schuldt — Cherished Friend and Industry Legend

CHICAGO, IL — CEO Jane E. Schuldt, CITE, CIS, beloved incentive industry leader and advocate, died May 20 of



SCHULDT

been rich and full because of friends, family and the opportunities I've been afforded around the world."

Jane described her journey as developing deep relationships with SITE

members and appreciating cultural perspectives. While an engaged SITE member and volunteer leader for 37 years, she built her company, World Marketing Group, a destination marketing company headquartered in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

Jane's style was admired far and wide. She was a knowledgeable, strong and graceful leader, filled with gratitude for the companionship of her industry friends. She appreciated the incentive industry ecosystem, the business models of every segment, the individuals who make it work and how transformative travel is to people's lives. Being a voice for the incentive travel industry was her favorite cause.

When the incentive industry suf-

fered a down cycle, she was there to push it up and overcome whatever obstacles challenged it. She was a curious learner, listener and not afraid to point out what could be done better.

During Jane's presidency in 1991, she focused on globalizing SITE by launching chapters and designing local education with a global message. She held the first SITE conference outside of North America in Dublin, Ireland. Her hot button was ethical behavior in business and she advocated vociferously for SITE's Code of Ethics. As a past president, she's remained one of SITE's most active volunteer contributors. She was often seen tapping talented individuals on the shoulder saying, "You should be more involved; you would make a good leader."

*Excerpted from a letter by Kevin M. Hinton, CEO of SITE. [www.siteglobal.com](http://www.siteglobal.com)*

## Hyatt Regency Jacksonville Completes Upgrades

JACKSONVILLE, FL — Hyatt Regency Jacksonville Riverfront hotel announced the completion of additional upgrades to complement last year's multimillion-dollar renovation of all 951 guest rooms, corridors, the rooftop fitness center and Regency Club lounge. These upgrades — including a more contemporary front desk, a revamped Grand Ballroom and the installation of digital reader boards in multiple meeting spaces.

As one of the leading U.S. hotel brands that are saying goodbye to traditional, formal reception desks, Hyatt is quickly embracing the trend of individual, pod-style desks that offer a smoother guest experience with a more personalized greeting. These desks also enable guests to more privately complete functions such as checking in and paying bills.

The revamped, 28,000-sf Grand Ballroom, which includes new carpet



The Grand Ballroom at the Hyatt Regency Jacksonville Riverfront.

and wall panels, provides a more appealing and appropriate environment for today's corporate business and social events. The space also more appropriately blends with the hotel's guest room renovations completed last year.

As the largest convention hotel between Atlanta and Orlando, Hyatt

Regency Jacksonville Riverfront has immersed itself in the "Green Meetings" trend that promotes eco-friendly meeting concepts and tools. By incorporating digital reader boards, the hotel greatly reduces its paper-material consumption, saving more than 5,000 sheets of paper per year.

<https://jacksonville.regency.hyatt.com>



Credits: 1. & 2. Landry & Kling; 3. MPI; 4. & 5. Kristina Schaefer, IMEX Frankfurt; 6. Xchel Guillermo Ledesma; 7. & 8. © Eddie Arrossi, eddie@eapphoto.com

**1** Celebrity Cruises hosted an anniversary luncheon for **2** Joyce Landry (l) and Josephine Kling aboard Celebrity Reflection at PortMiami including local cruise industry colleagues, vendors, long-time friends and supporters who gathered to celebrate the 35th anniversary of Landry & Kling Global Cruise Events — the leading producer of cruise events for the MICE market (Meetings, Incentives, Conventions, Events). **3** At IMEX Frankfurt, MPI President and CEO Paul Van Deventer (l) and Kevin Hinton, CEO of SITE, shake hands in front of the signage promoting the 2018 Global Forum in Italy, and **4** industry professionals from around the world and on the IMEX expo floor at the **5** Canadian booth. **6** Palace Resorts welcomed Mexican President Enrique Peña Nieto to the celebration of the opening of The Grand at Moon Palace Cancun on May 25. **7** Kim Lambeth, **8** (l to r) Michelle Soto, Melissa Riley, Allison Doherty, Nancy Umansky and more than 1,000 leaders attended the premier industry recognition event — the 2017 PCMA Education Foundation Visionary Awards May 3 at the Marriott Marquis Washington, DC.



By Sam Smith

## Mobile Apps Are Not the Future of Event Planning — *They Are the Present!*

In the age of instant digital gratification, the event planning industry has experienced its fair share of changes. Fortunately, it also has found ways to create new opportunities out of those changes. Case in point: The single most useful tool to many event planners now is the mobile app.

An estimated 92 percent of 18–34 year olds now own a smartphone, and 99 percent of young people are regular internet users. What better way to reach potential event attendees than with an app they can access from their mobile device? It's fast, convenient and hassle-free. And event planners have taken note. As of 2015, 85 percent of event planners and organizers were using mobile apps to organize and run their events.

Here are a few of the potential benefits of using mobile apps.

### Differentiate From the Competition

Many traditional event planning tactics still are effective, but only because they've embraced digital tools. For instance, when planning a trade show or event, word of mouth can be a powerful tool. Today, however, word of mouth doesn't take place by the water cooler or hotel bar, but on LinkedIn, Twitter and Facebook. In the same way, mobile apps let organizers expand their reach and impact.

What are some of the ways mobile apps can empower event organizers to do their jobs more effectively? Here are some examples:

- **Local Festivals** can span a single street or entire city blocks, and often come with food, music, games and other exhibits for guests to enjoy. Why not help them plan out their route beforehand? An app can allow guests to map their route and schedule their days during festival times. Not only does this promote attendee engagement, but it can save organizers printing costs.
- **Conferences** often house multiple workshops and panels over the course of a few days, but navigating through local venues can be difficult. Mobile apps include maps and schedules so attendees know exactly where to go and when to be there. Likewise, organizers can use any number of apps to coordinate these events in real time. Sudden changes to the schedule are common, and mobile apps make it easy to update everyone instantly.
- **Trade Associations.** When planning an event with a

trade association, mobile apps are invaluable. These events are typically held for networking purposes, and apps can actually help people connect beforehand and set up meetings.

- **Individual Brands.** Whether it's a theater group or a dance company or a showcase, it requires a lot of planning. If there are multiple groups performing or brands giving presentations, it can be difficult to keep track of them all. A mobile app will allow your attendees easy access to schedules and other important information on the go.

Whether you're planning an event or you're just looking for a more innovative way to make an event convenient and fun for guests, you should never underestimate the power of mobile apps for an edge over the traditional competition.

### Maintaining Customer Relationships

If you want a way to keep building customer relationships after an event has ended, mobile apps are the way to go. For example, if you've used an app to help plan a music festival or a showcase, diversify your efforts by offering a DVD of the event to your customers through the mobile app.

Have an event that happens annually? Why not keep in contact with your attendees throughout the year with a mobile app? This method of communication will allow you to send planning updates, entertainment lineups and other messages directly to mobile app users without worrying about paper mail or an email ending up in the spam folder.

But event planners beware! While it can be tempting to use mobile apps for constant communication, make sure you're not bombarding your users with endless updates. Too many push notifications can actually push users away from your app.

### Sponsors Get More

Sponsors are incredibly important to any event, and making sure they're recognized for their contributions is a huge part of event planning. Sending out paper or emails comes with its fair share of hazards. But one guaranteed way to make sure sponsors have their names prominently displayed is with mobile apps.

Sponsor recognition can make or break your next event, as a happy sponsor is usually a repeat sponsor! Taking the time to discuss various mobile app branding options and sharing

page impression and click data with them via a mobile app is a surefire way to make sure they feel recognized. Not to mention, mobile app ads will definitely generate more web traffic to their sites.

In fact, when Meeting Professionals International surveyed event planners about why they use mobile apps to plan events, increasing sponsorship revenue was one of the top answers. About 9 percent of respondents said they used mobile apps to create new sponsorship opportunities at their event.

### Real-Time Event Updates

Who says your app's usefulness has to stop when your event starts? If you follow Murphy's Law, you know that anything that can go wrong, definitely will go wrong. In the past,

contact one another and schedule meetups before they even arrive at the festival grounds.

Mobile apps can provide a similar experience for attendees eager to network. This can be especially useful if your event is one that lends itself to professional or social networking. Not only that, but it remains useful long after your event has ended, as guests can continue to use the app to stay in contact with leads.

### The Verdict: Mobile Apps Have Changed Events for Good

These are just a handful of the many benefits mobile apps can provide to professional event planners. From improving the attendee experience to more accurately measuring return on investment, there are so many more ways to use apps to

“Mobile apps include **maps** and **schedules** so attendees know exactly **where** to go and **when** to be there.”

these last-minute changes could have ruined an entire event, leading to mass confusion on the trade show floor. But mobile apps have changed all that.

Instead of letting a last-minute lineup change ruin your carefully planned event, keep your guests updated in real time via your mobile app. As soon as you know a change is happening, your guests should know about it, too, so they can effectively adjust their plans.

### More Networking Opportunities

Did you know that SXSW has a social network just for their event? Though their social network is a large-scale project, it's an excellent example of what networking can do for an event when it is planned properly. The festival's social network not only offers a directory of guests attending, it allows guests to

your advantage before, during, and after your event. There are even event planning apps that allow you to create a custom app for your event, a sort of meta-app.

Mobile apps aren't the future of professional event planning — they're very much the present. Already, 86 percent of trade show organizers and 40 percent of convention centers offer their attendees custom mobile apps, and those numbers will only increase as late adopters discover some of the benefits outlined above.

Mobile apps have so much to offer to event attendees and event planners. Their diversity, flexibility and convenience make them extremely valuable to any party involved in event organization. If you're waiting for the right moment to try this planning strategy, it's now. Don't wait to hop on this trend! It could make all the difference at your next event. **C&IT**



**Sam Smith**

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### FOLLOW IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF STEVE IRWIN

At Australia Zoo in the Sunshine Coast Hinterland, the animal encounters come thick and fast. Steve Irwin's legacy lives on in this 100-acre park, which is home to more than 1,200 animals. Today, Terri, Bindi and Robert continue the conservation work of the Crocodile Hunter with their menagerie of Australian native animals, including wombats, koalas, crocodiles, possums and echidnas. Groups of up to 10,000 people can be accommodated in the park for gala events. Hands-on experiences include kangaroo feeding, breakfast with dingoes, and the chance to take a wombat for a walk. Increase the feel-good factor by volunteering at the Australia Zoo Wildlife Hospital.

[www.australiazoo.com.au](http://www.australiazoo.com.au)

### SWIM WITH DORY

Fancy snorkelling with Dory or chilling with Crush the turtle? On the Great Barrier Reef in Queensland, there's no end to the aquatic adventures on offer. Chartered day trips with eco-minded operators, such as Sailaway Port Douglas, lead small-group tours to secluded lagoons and reef-fringed isles within easy reach of the mainland. Spend your day swimming in the warm, clear waters; take a guided snorkelling tour with a marine biologist; or view the underwater scenes through a glass-bottomed boat. Be sure to pack a waterproof camera so you can snap the colourful corals, green and loggerhead turtles, and vivid Blue Tangs of Dory fame.

[www.sailawayportdouglas.com](http://www.sailawayportdouglas.com)

### CUDDLE A KOALA

There's one photo that's essential in every Australian album: cuddling a koala. Lone Pine is Australia's largest koala sanctuary and it's conveniently located less than 30 minutes from the centre of Brisbane. The sanctuary is home to over 130 koalas, as well as 150 free-ranging kangaroos and wallabies. Sign up for the Koala Encounter to watch a koala health check, then enter the enclosure for a cuddle and your close-up. Exclusive small-group sessions cater for up to six people at a time, ensuring everyone gets a chance to interact with these furry creatures. If you want to add extra thrills to your Lone Pine experience, enquire about having your photo snapped with a giant bird of prey, lizard or snake.

[www.koala.net](http://www.koala.net)

### SAY HELLO TO SEA-LIONS AND PENGUINS

Overlooking Sydney Harbour at Mosman, Taronga Zoo plays host to one of the country's rarest and most endangered seal species, the Australian sea-lion. Watch these graceful 'ballerinas of the sea' from the underwater viewing gallery. Other highlights in Taronga Zoo's Great Southern Oceans precinct include the Penguin Encounter, an intimate tour that allows groups of four to hand-feed Little Penguins, the world's smallest penguin species.

[www.taronga.org.au](http://www.taronga.org.au)

### TAKE A WALK ON THE WILD SIDE

For the quintessential Australian bush experience, book a stay at Emirates One&Only Wolgan Valley. Set within the rugged landscape of the Greater Blue Mountains, a three-hour drive from Sydney, Wolgan Valley teams wildlife thrills with luxurious accommodation and fine food and wine. After a day spent horse riding or taking a guided nature walk, treat your team to the Wildlife and Sundowners Tour, a two-hour tour for up to 40 guests that takes in kangaroos, wallaroos and wombats when they are at their most active. Conservation activities are also on offer, including the Wombat Warrior program, which tracks wombat movements and habitats throughout 7000-acre Wolgan Valley reserve. If you're lucky, you may even spot a rare albino wallaby.

[www.oneandonlyresorts.com/one-and-only-wolgan-valley-australia](http://www.oneandonlyresorts.com/one-and-only-wolgan-valley-australia)

For more program ideas visit  
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## Golf & Spa Resorts

### A Score Card on Select Properties From the Planner Point of View

By Christine Loomis

Golf tournaments can bond co-workers, foster healthy competition and provide extensive networking opportunities. Tournaments also offer productive fundraising opportunities and give employees, VIPs, C-suite execs and incentive-award qualifiers the time and place to play and relax.

Of course, nothing says relaxation like time in a spa, a luxury well deserved by all who work hard and positively impact their company's bottom line. Looking for a setting for your meeting or incentive program? Consider some of the top golf and spa resorts from coast to coast and beyond. Certainly, golf and spa resorts provide the perfect destination for golf tournaments. But they meet the needs

of planners and attendees in many other ways, too. Here is an inside look at select resorts from the planner's point of view.

#### Sea Island Resort

The RSM Classic is an excellent fit at Sea Island Resort on the Georgia coast. The PGA Tour event is held on the Seaside and Plantation golf courses. "Sea Island Resort aligns very well with our firm and our brand," says Joy Demme, director, national meetings, with RSM US LLP, an audit, tax and consulting firm. "At RSM we value excellence, teamwork, respect, integrity and stewardship, and these are all attributes that Sea Island values as well."

During the week of the Classic, the

company brings in approximately 500 guests, though not all arrive and depart simultaneously.

RSM has partnered with the resort since the tournament began in 2010. "When we made the decision to become the title sponsor of this PGA Tour event," Demme says, "we knew we could not be holding the tournament in a better location, given the spectacular views, amazing golf courses, award-winning accommodations and first-class culinary team."

The meeting space is excellent as well. "Sea Island Resort has a wide array of venues that can be used for meetings and evening functions. And, while the golf is plentiful, there are many other activities to choose from, including horseback



RSM US is the title sponsor for The RSM Classic, a PGA Tour event held on Sea Island Resort's Seaside (pictured) and Plantation courses.

runs between the hotels make it easy to get around."

Naturally, the resort's golf courses are a huge asset. "During the week of The RSM Classic, we host rounds of golf on the Retreat and Plantation courses. Both receive rave reviews from our guests, and the golf staff is great to work with," Demme says.

"And while we work with many people throughout the resort, our two main points of contact, Reint Venker, director of national sales, and Erik Klette, our conference services manager, ensure that the planning process is as easy as possible. The catering, décor and AV teams are fantastic to work with, too. They're innovative, creative, and they listen to your needs and strive to provide options that will not only fit your budget but also impress your guests."

While Demme notes that there are always challenges when planning a

sort, on the coast of Georgia, does require added travel time, however Demme sees that as an asset, noting that its location "is one of the things that makes it the gem that it is. It's true that it takes some time to get to the Golden Isles from the airports, but the travel time is worth it to enjoy one of the most spectacular and welcoming resorts I have ever had the opportunity to visit."

Sea Island Resort, surrounded by five miles of private beach, is billed as the only resort in the world to achieve four Forbes Five Star awards nine years in a row.

#### The Broadmoor

The Broadmoor, in Colorado Springs, Colorado, is known for its striking setting, range of upscale accommodations and three excellent golf courses. Sasha Samuel, coordinator of the annual Messenger Cup, a tournament that draws 300-plus and raises money to assist those in need in many countries, calls The Broadmoor ideal for this event and its corporate sponsors.

"The Broadmoor is a five-star, five-diamond resort that can properly host our VIPs during the event. The lodging options provide a wide variety of suites for our group as well," and, she adds, proximity to the Colorado Springs airport makes travel seamless.

"The golf course is a major part of our event. Our golfers know their stuff, so to have them be challenged during the tournament is important. The resort has options for non-golfers, too, including zip lining, biking and other sports. At the spa, the staff is excellent, and treatments are updated often to keep things

**"Sea Island Resort aligns very well with our firm and our brand. At RSM we value excellence, teamwork, respect, integrity and stewardship, and these are all attributes that Sea Island values as well."**

**Joy Demme, Director, National Meetings  
RSM US LLP, Chicago, IL**



riding, fishing, skeet shooting and the ever popular state-of-the-art spa and tennis facilities."

Sea Island has multiple lodging options, and Demme notes that function space is convenient, regardless of accommodations. "If you are not staying right at the hotel where the function will take place, the shuttles Sea Island

large event, she says a solid relationship makes all the difference. "Because of the relationships we have built with Sea Island Resort over the past several years, it is much easier to discuss challenges and potentially mitigate issues before they arise. Having that continuity has been invaluable to us as we plan each year."

One potential challenge is that the re-





(Above) The Broadmoor's Forbes Five Star spa. (Right) The Broadmoor hosts the annual Messenger Cup, a charity tournament.

fresh. Above all," Samuel says, "it's The Broadmoor staff that keeps us coming back. Everything is always taken care of with precision and excellence. In the off chance it's not, they make it right."

Mark Schick, CEO of Master Mechanical, an HVAC company, is both sponsor and participant. He says it's a good fit for his company "to be part of something that involves rescue of the exploited and that reaches the world. Oh, and the golf? It's pretty great."

He's played in the tournament the past four years, even after knee surgeries. "I have been fortunate to play at amazing courses all over the world, but for me, this tournament has always been a respite and something I absolutely look forward to every year."

He loves staying at The Broadmoor, which he calls "amazing due to its history, accommodations, cuisine, recreation and staff," but notes it's "the depth of the friendships that have been forged because of participating in the Messenger Cup" that mean the most.

Danny Snipes, president of The Extraordinary Group, which helps aspiring entrepreneurs achieve success, is another corporate sponsor. "We enthusiastically support Messenger International as they teach, reach and rescue people globally," he says, adding, "Of course the golfing experience at The Broadmoor is fun, challenging and memorable."

For others considering corporate sponsorship of a golf event Snipes says, "People work diligently in business to succeed, so when they give their earnings and block out time on their calendars,

**"The golfing experience at The Broadmoor is fun, challenging and memorable."**

**Danny Snipes**, President  
The Extraordinary Group, Raleigh, NC

it's important they come away refreshed, feeling appreciated and that they are making a difference. That's what The Broadmoor and Messenger International do so well together."

#### Kingsmill Resort

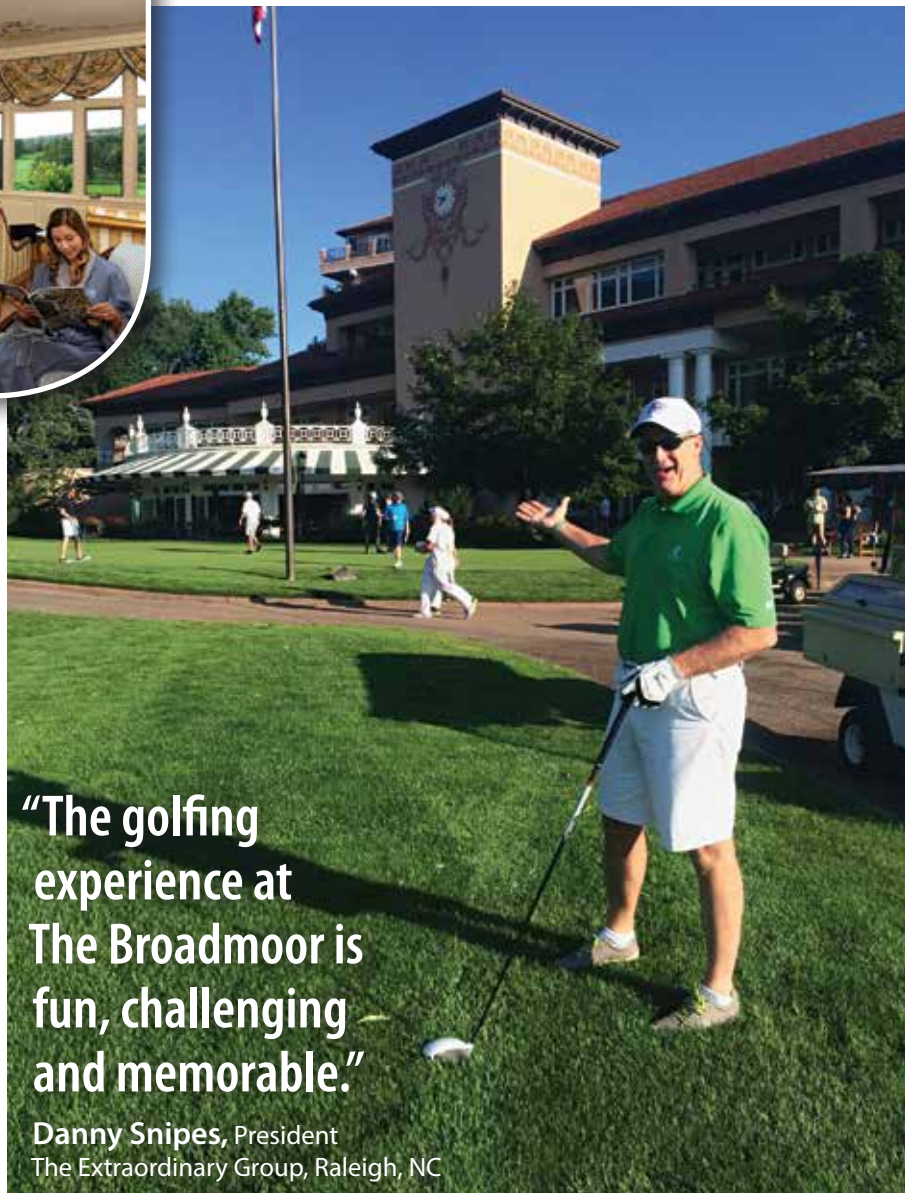
Kingsmill Resort in Williamsburg, Virginia, purchased earlier this year by Escalante Golf, is another East Coast option. Lansing Building Products held its annual sales meeting there in January.

Fred Mullins, Lansing marketing manager, says the location is excellent. "We've had our meetings in Savannah, Myrtle Beach, locations in North Carolina and other places, but we feel that Kingsmill really wants us and values our relationship."

The sales meeting has been held at

Kingsmill for the past four years. "We continue to choose Kingsmill for several reasons," Mullins says. "The customer service is excellent. Our associates feel they are valued as guests, and our needs are met with courtesy and promptness. Additionally, the resort doesn't have that hotel/conference feel and the cost is competitive with other locations. Finally, Kingsmill has great grounds and views."

Mullins has high praise for the staff. "Everyone is wonderful to work with. I regularly saw the general manager, sales manager and event manager during our four-day event. They're accessible and checked in on us often. The event staff is first class. They listen to our desires and make them happen. If a need arose, I could find someone quickly to assist me.



Credit: The Extraordinary Group

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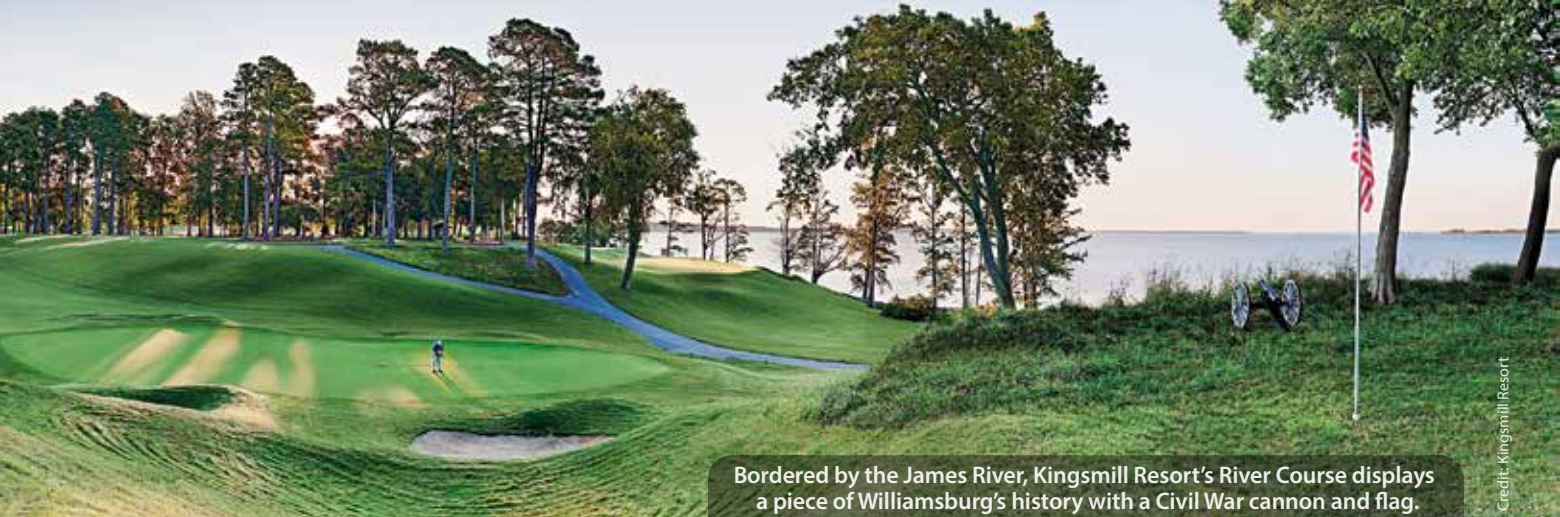


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**THE  
BROADMOOR**







Bordered by the James River, Kingsmill Resort's River Course displays a piece of Williamsburg's history with a Civil War cannon and flag.

Credit: Kingsmill Resort

There was consistent communication in the preparation stage to make sure our needs were being met. Kingsmill's lodging is also top notch. The rooms were renovated recently and are comfortable, relaxing and quiet."

Mullins says Kingsmill also offers variety, comfort and a modern feel in its meeting space. "Our daily meeting was for 150 people and the room easily held that number. We had several smaller breakout sessions, and there's a continuous break station located nearby."

Although the meeting rooms are a couple of minutes away from lodging, Mullins says the resort has a free shuttle for attendees who don't want to walk.

Mullins' one suggestion for planners is to make a site visit. "Because Kingsmill is not your typical meeting venue," he says, "I suggest a site visit to get a true feel for the property. And even though our group stays on property, there are lots of activities available in the Williamsburg area."

Waste Management Renewable Energy brought 129 attendees to Kingsmill in 2016 for its annual conference. Mary Heckaman, senior EA/event planner, also calls the resort a great fit.

"Williamsburg has access to three airports, plenty of rental cars and transportation companies," she says, "and the meeting space worked well. It allowed nice space between participants as well as

burg and Busch Gardens, which is great for families in attendance."

And then there's the staff. "There was Scott Russell, my morning latte boy; he had them there every morning like clockwork. Michelle Lotts, planner extraordinaire, was full of great ideas and alternate plans. We worked with the kitchen on last-minute items I forgot to include — who forgets chocolate? And our AV crew was unbelievable. We will never go without teleprompters again."

Spouses and families at this meeting are invited to participate in all meals, making logistics paramount. "All of the food was delicious. I cannot think of one thing my group did not like or complained about," Heckaman says, adding that staff came through on efficiency as well. "Two buffet tables and four lines is an example. They figured that out after the first meal."

Because Williamsburg and Kingsmill are such family-friendly destinations, they're a good fit for meetings that include family. "My attendees loved that the meeting rate was available three days prior and after the event," Heckaman says. "There's so much to do with all of the pools on property and playgrounds. The rooms are all freshly updated and very clean. There are also three- to four-bedroom cottages along the river, which I definitely recommend for VIPs."

One downside was the outside transportation company. Heckaman says she'll use a different one for the next meeting, which will be this year. "I'm pretty fussy, and we are going to be repeating our business at Kingsmill in 2017."



**"We've had our meetings in Savannah, Myrtle Beach, locations in North Carolina and other places, but we feel that Kingsmill really wants us and values our relationship."**

**Fred Mullins, Marketing Manager**  
Lansing Building Products, Richmond, VA

All functions were held on property where Mullins says the food is excellent. "We had three meals catered, two dinners and one lunch. One dinner was for 325 people. The wait staff served all guests quickly and professionally. We also used the buffet at Elements restaurant for breakfast and lunch a couple of days and the restaurant easily handled 125."

As for AV, Mullins says, "Since we have been there four years, the AV staff has our meeting needs memorized. In fact," he adds, "you see the same Kingsmill employees repeatedly, which gives you a sense of friendship and trust."

ergonomic chairs and state-of-the-art AV." The fact that Kingsmill is a self-contained property is a plus. "Our meetings are intensive so it is a positive to have business as well as leisure activities on property," Heckaman says. "I don't need to rave about the golf course or spa as they receive accolades from many sources. The housing is a favorite as most rooms are a condo setup with living room, full kitchen and bedroom. Extra bedrooms can be added for flexibility."

In addition to cost, amenities and great meeting space, she says, "The resort provides free transport to historic Williams-

## Innisbrook

Northwest of Tampa in Palm Harbor, Florida, Innisbrook, a Salamander Golf & Spa Resort, stands out in a state loaded with golf resorts. Elsevier, a global information analytics company, brought 400 attendees to Innisbrook in January for its national sales meeting. Yazmin Zayas, senior manager, exhibits and events, says the resort was able to provide the large breakout space needed as well as two separate buildings for two separate groups.

"The food is outstanding, and the chef will work with you if your guests have any special needs," she says. "PSAV provided our AV and did an amazing job with our general sessions and made it a memorable production for the attendees."

Among the standouts on staff were Cindi Thomas and Ron Long. Zayas says there were a lot of last-minute requests for dinners in the resort for the free afternoon and Thomas came through. "She was able to get everyone accommodated seamlessly. She is truly a pleasure to work with."

Also of note was John Harrison in sales

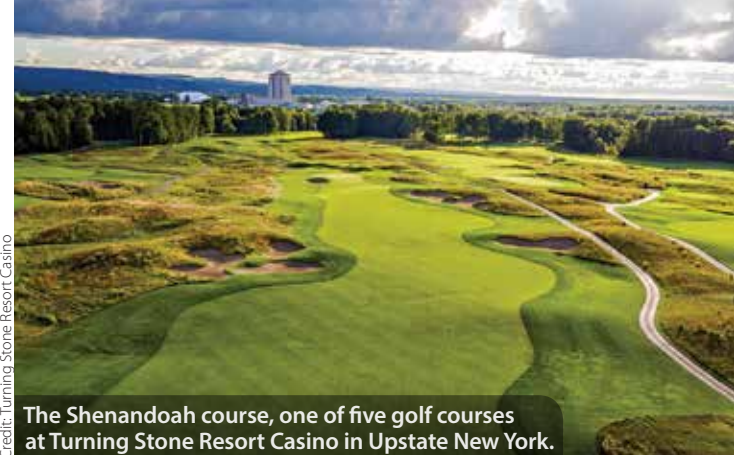
who, Zayas says, made the experience from that end extremely easy, including contracts. "But the entire staff will work really hard to accommodate your every need," she says. "They're helpful, knowledgeable and made our experience memorable."

One consideration to keep in mind is that meeting space is a walk or shuttle ride from guest rooms. "Work closely with your events team and provide a schedule of events ahead of time so shuttles can be scheduled appropriately," Zayas suggests. "Most rooms are within walking distance of meeting space, and it's a nice walk on a cool, sunny day. But you need to alert attendees of this so they schedule their time accordingly if they're walking."

Additionally, she says, the resort's distance from the airport is important to consider. "While the resort is a great venue, the airport is a bit removed and

there's traffic in the area. If you are doing anything off-property, take traffic into consideration. That said, I think the resort offers everything you need without having to step outside."

Finally, Zayas notes, "Hiring a good DMC to manage your transportation is key to making the transition between airport and resort easier. Also, alert guests of weather conditions a few days before the meeting. Keeping them informed will help them pack the right clothes and make the meeting experience better. You can never give your attendees too much information."



The Shenandoah course, one of five golf courses at Turning Stone Resort Casino in Upstate New York.

Credit: Turning Stone Resort Casino

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Streamsong Resort in Central Florida has two highly rated golf courses with a third debuting this fall.

Credit: Streamsong Resort

## The Westin Playa Bonita

Farther afield, The Westin Playa Bonita in Panama City, Panama, also offers corporate groups a base in which to meet and play golf. Tina R. Ulm, president of TRU Incentives Inc., worked with Chief Buildings, a Nebraska-based metal-building manufacturer, to create an incentive program for 248 at the resort in February.

"Panama is a wonderful destination for groups looking for warmth, sunshine and culture," Ulm says. "Our group prefers inclusive or all-inclusive properties and this Westin worked on an inclusive budget that was very acceptable to us."

She calls Panama's climate in the first quarter of the year exceptional and says the area offers rich cultural opportunities. The group held a private function at Miraflores Locks overlooking the Panama Canal, which Ulm describes as "an amazing event location." But it wasn't the only wow factor.



**"Our golfers know their stuff, so to have them be challenged during the tournament is important. The (Broadmoor) has options for non-golfers, too. At the spa, the staff is excellent."**

**Sasha Samuel, Coordinator**  
Messenger Cup, Palmer Lake, CO

Ulm says participants were awed by the old town within Panama City, the golf, ruins, rainforest, peacock bass fishing on the canal and interactions with local indigenous people. "All of my VIPs and some top customers played golf at Tucán Golf Course," she adds. The DMC based at The Westin Playa Bonita arranges golf for hotel guests at the Tucán Golf Club, just north of Playa Bonita.

The hotel's Sensory Spa by Clarins features a Polar Cold plunge pool, herbal sauna, 13 treatment rooms and a hydrotherapy circuit.

As for the service, she says, "The hotel team did a great job. Gabby Herrera and her team were amazing to work with and always went the extra mile. Everything is very easily accessible at this property. The

décor is nice and AV is wonderful to work with — almost a one-stop planning event. And it's very cost effective for such a great destination."

While Ulm's one caveat is to avoid Carnival time — Panama has the second largest Carnival celebration in the world — she encourages planners to consider the country. "Your participants will enjoy far more than sunshine," she says. "And the locals are beautiful people as well."

## Streamsong Resort

The 16,000-acre Streamsong Resort in Central Florida received golf accolades in April from *Golfweek*, which listed Streamsong Red and Streamsong Blue as the No. 2 and No. 3 golf courses to play in Florida. They bested 27 other Florida golf courses on the list. Built around the contours of former phosphate mines, the courses feature rolling elevation changes, native grasses and stunning views of ridges and

Streamsong Resort features 228 guest rooms, 25,000 sf of indoor and 40,000 sf of outdoor meeting and event space, five dining options, conference and event facilities, the grotto-style AcquaPietra Spa and infinity pool. Streamsong's Clubhouse includes 12 guest rooms, a restaurant and bar, an award-winning golf shop and meeting space with breathtaking views. In addition to golf, guests can enjoy such activities as bass fishing, sporting clays, nature trails and tennis.

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tennis courts, and two indoor racquetball courts. There are a total of 707 guest rooms in four onsite hotels and more than 125,000 sf of flexible meeting and event space. The Clubhouse at Shennendoah offers three banquet rooms with fireplace and large balcony overlooking the 10th and 18th holes.

The championship Shingle Creek Golf Course at Rosen Shingle Creek in Orlando underwent an innovative redesign by Arnold Palmer Golf Company. A new, open-air covered pavilion for 19th-hole events is part of the mix.

On Florida's Southwest Gulf Coast, The Naples Beach Hotel & Golf Club debuted the Jack Nicklaus redesign of its on-property championship golf course last fall. **C&IT**



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# The European Dilemma

> > > How Growing Safety and Security Concerns Are Impacting Overseas Site Selection

By John Buchanan

For decades, famous and time-honored European destinations such as London, Rome and Paris have been wildly popular among meeting planners and attendees. Over the last year — and just last month in Manchester, England — a series of terrorist attacks has prompted increasing security concerns that have markedly dampened enthusiasm for some destinations.

Yet it's also true that aside from the security concerns that

have recently become a factor in destination decision-making, the market for European meetings is evolving and growing, says Pittsburgh-based Teri Curry, CMP, CIS, CTC, CMMM, senior international sourcing manager at Maritz Global Events. "Companies are becoming more global, so a lot of mid-range companies are opening offices in foreign destinations and doing local meetings in those destinations," Curry

says. "But for companies that source international meetings in the U.S., they are still primarily incentive programs or meetings being held by large global companies, such as technology or pharmaceutical companies."

But, she says, the meetings portion of the market is growing and will continue to grow.

## Up and Down Demand

Nevertheless, demand that was robust for European destinations for the last two years is down slightly this year, Curry says. "For the last couple of years, demand has been very strong, because of the strength of the dollar and the obvious appeal of European destinations," she says. "And as a result of Brexit last year, both the British pound sterling and the Euro fell drastically in comparison to the dollar, so that gave U.S. companies strong buying

power and enhanced any interest in Europe that already existed. And that buying power is still there."

But growing security concerns have dampened the enthusiasm of many U.S. companies for European events. "For Paris or some places in Germany, security concerns are definitely a major factor, Curry says. "But for other places, like London, where the environment is very stable right now and the buying power is strong, demand is still strong."



**Teri Curry, CMP, CIS, CTC, CMMM**  
Senior International Sourcing Manager  
Maritz Global Events  
Pittsburgh, PA

**"Young people, in the high tech field, or more sophisticated and well-traveled industries like financial services, tend to see a trip to Europe, and even to Paris, as more of an adventure than a risk."**





Asked to comment on whether last month's terrorist attack on Manchester Arena would impact decisions to hold meetings 200 miles south in London, Curry responds, "I think the political and economic environments in London are still stable. I think that the attack in Manchester is a sad statement that nowhere is 100 percent safe in the 'civilized world.' ...We can't let what happened yesterday prevent us from living tomorrow."

Despite the security concerns about European travel that have generated newspaper headlines and TV coverage in the U.S. this spring, Sharon L. Schenk, CMP, director, conventions and event management at corporate conglomerate CCA Global Partners in Manchester, New Hampshire, is still enthusiastic about Continental destinations for the incentive travel programs she plans.

"Our situation, when it comes to European meetings, has not changed at all," Schenk says. "For us, there is no hesitation to go to Europe. We are still very interested in taking our incentive



programs to international destinations, and Europe has always been popular with our attendees and it always will be."

However, she does acknowledge that, in general, "there is more trepidation about going to Europe than there used to be. For example, I think the recent bombing in Manchester, U.K., is certainly going to have an impact on how people perceive Europe and the climate there. And part of that is the acts of violence we've all seen on TV. But at the same time, there have been acts of violence that have happened within the U.S. (Terrorism) is just a reality now."

Schenk also points out that one can make an argument that much of the current sense of danger in Europe is more perceptual than real, based on statistics. "But the perception is what matters, since most people are more ruled by emotions than facts, she says." In addition, the U.S. media makes the problem worse by hyping terror attacks around the clock for days and even weeks after the event, she says.

#### Travel Warning

However, Schenk acknowledges that the unprecedented travel warning

issued by the U.S. State Department on May 1 — for all of Europe — understandably increases the perception of danger and accentuates security concerns for both companies and attendees. "And that's not the media saying there are safety concerns," Schenk says. "That's our government saying it. So naturally, that is going to have more impact on international travel. And, in a general way, I can't see how that won't have a negative effect on demand for European meeting destinations. There are just going to be some companies that say 'we're not going to even consider going to Europe while that is in effect.'"

To make matters even worse for prospective meeting hosts and planners wanting to go to Europe, the State Department advisory singled out airports, hotels, restaurants, nightclubs and shopping malls as high-risk venues.

The warning has particularly exacerbated security concerns for historically popular destinations such as Paris. "And because of that," Curry says, "I think a company would have to do a lot more now to sell Paris as a destination. For example, at the very least they'd have to provide information on

what has been done to enhance the safety of visitors and what measures the company will be taking to keep their attendees safe."

As result, she recently saw a client choose to avoid Paris. A meeting proposed for the City of Light was relocated to Barcelona. "And why did they change their minds?" Curry says. "Because they got opposition from top management to doing the meeting in Paris because of security concerns."

#### Expert Advice

For meeting hosts or planners who want to use a European destination, the important thing is to understand the underlying issues and make an informed decision, says Tim Bradley, a former FBI agent who now works as a consultant to Pembroke Pines, Florida-based travel security advisory firm Incident Management Group Inc. "The fact is, it's hard to determine where the risk is," Bradley says. "For example, with regard to the police officer that was recently shot in Paris, does that increase the risk of going to Paris? In a general sense, it's hard to quantify risk. On the same day the police officer was shot in Paris, two were shot in Seattle. And we

didn't hear as much about that. So part of the discussion becomes about how much media coverage is doing to perpetuate the sense of risk."

Christopher Hagon, Incident Management Group's Orlando-based managing partner and a former member of the protective detail for Britain's royal family, amplifies the media-hyped perception issue with a specific example. "A few years ago, we did the security planning for a President's Club-level event in Paris," he says. "And just prior to the trip, the London bus and subway bombings happened. And if you watched the BBC presentation of those events, compared to CNN, you wouldn't believe you were seeing two reports of the same attacks. And of course, people in the U.S. were watching CNN and not the BBC. The point is that London is a large city of 820 square miles. And people who were just three or four streets away had no idea the attacks had even happened until they saw the police cars and so on. But for our group, the discussion was immediately about whether or not to cancel the trip to London, which would have cost millions of dollars to do. We explained to them that we had contacts in the security services in London. And we told them we could modify the comprehensive plan that was already in place in order to meet the changing circumstances on the ground. We also told them that we did not believe the risk in the future would impact them. But at the same time, the decision was being made on the basis of the coverage of the London attacks being provided by the U.S. media. However, once they were presented with our expertise and information, they decided to go forward with the program. And they did so safely."



**Christopher Hagon**  
Managing Partner  
Incident Management Group Inc.  
Orlando, FL

**"The decision (to cancel) was being made on the basis of the coverage of the London attacks being provided by the U.S. media. However, once they were presented with our expertise and information, they decided to go forward with the program. And they did so safely."**

put into planning and preparation, the more prepared you are, by definition, for anything that could happen. And whether the risk is real or not, the indisputable part of the issue is that people do not feel as safe going to Europe today as they did a few years ago. And that's a fact. So that means more needs to be done so that people can feel safe."

Given the risks and potential liability of a terrorist attack, the ideal situation is to have an expert security consultancy such as Incident Management Group get involved in the threat assessment and planning process even before the destination and the hotel are finalized, Bradley says. "No decision should have been made yet on activities or excursions, either. That gives us a chance to assess and vet the entire experience,



**Sharon L. Schenk, CMP**  
Director, Conventions and Event Management  
CCA Global  
Portsmouth, NH

**"Our situation, when it comes to European meetings, has not changed at all. For us, there is no hesitation to go to Europe."**



as it is being discussed and considered. The point is to avoid any kind of decision that can in and of itself put people at risk."

The next step is detailed contingency planning. "You answer questions such as, 'What do we do if this happens? What do we do if that happens? How do we get in touch with people?' And one of the things that we find most companies have overlooked when they come

real time in the event of an emergency. "What clients like about it is that it is very robust," Hagon says. "It tends to work almost everywhere, unless there is no Wi-Fi available. It's also a simple system. It's built to account for people as quickly as possible and then, in turn, to inform their loved ones back in the U.S. of their status. And those are by far the two most important practical functions in an emergency situation."

### Subjective Decision-making

Just as is the case with other elements of meeting planning, there can be no hard and fast rule that dictates how decisions should be made about using a European destination. Each company must base its decision on its own unique factors.

"For example," Curry says, "one big factor is who your attendees are. Young people, in the high tech field, or more sophisticated and well-traveled industries like financial services, tend to see a trip to Europe, and even to Paris, as more of an adventure than a risk. On the other hand, a major company that is going to be discussing sensitive information at the meeting, is probably going to be less likely to consider what is perceived as a risky destination. So I think the decision often comes down to the type of attendees and the type of meeting."

All planners understand that if a company is doing an incentive program, they're going to want to take their people to some place where they can either see or experience something that they would generally not easily have the ability to experience on their own, Curry notes. "And the good news in that regard is that Europe currently offers a wonderful range of less well known destinations that deliver both safety and a strong value proposition."

One current example Curry likes: Dubrovnik, Croatia. "It's a destination that is pretty exotic," she says. "It's one that most people would not think about traveling to on their own. And it's very safe because it has a very stable government. Most of all, it's a real medieval city with a lot of great history and architec-

ture. It also has an incredibly beautiful coastline. The HBO show "Game of Thrones" is filmed here, so it's the kind of place that will get people really excited. It has good hotel product and also offers a very good value proposition. So, it's a good example of the great European destinations that are out there that are unique and safe."

Other current examples of European destinations that offer safety, exotic appeal, and good value are Prague and Budapest, Curry says. "And then there are the destinations, like Lisbon, Portugal, that are also exotic, but also known to most people. And there is a lot going on in Portugal now that is very interesting. It's just a great destination for a meeting or incentive program."

Schenk will use Lisbon as the destination next year for a 600-attendee incentive program.

"Our people have never been to Lisbon and they're super-excited about going there," Schenk says. "And from a planner's perspective, Lisbon is exotic. It offers very good value. It's safe. It also has very good meeting infrastructure for the size of the group I'm bringing over. And you don't always find that in the less well-known European destinations. And when it comes to Lisbon, the best thing is I have not gotten any negative feedback from our top management or our attendees about going there."

Despite all the current chatter about the risks of going to Europe, Schenk says, there is a reality about destination selection that will endure forever. "When I look at destinations, I try to find a place we haven't gone," she says. "Then I try to get a sense of the infrastructure as it relates to the type and size of the program we're doing. And when it comes to European programs, that is always a consideration, because we're an American company with American employees. And we want the level of property and service that Americans are used to. And if you're going to a less well-known or smaller European destination, you have to pay attention to those things. But it's a fact that Europe has always been popular for meetings. And that will never change." **C&IT**

**"Whether the risk is real or not, the indisputable part of the issue is that people do not feel as safe going to Europe today as they did a few years ago. And that's a fact. So that means more needs to be done so that people can feel safe."**

**Tim Bradley**

Security Consultant  
Incident Management Group Inc.  
Pembroke Pines, FL

to us is a medical plan. And that doesn't just mean in the event of a terrorist attack. It means an attendee stepping off the curb and spraining their ankle, or having a heart attack. And those kinds of common medical emergencies are much more likely than a terrorist attack."

As a practical matter, the key component of a security plan is for attendees to know that in the event of a terrorist incident, they can be located and accounted for quickly and efficiently, and their loved ones back home can be notified quickly and efficiently that they are safe.

As a result of that fundamental need, five years ago Incident Management Group developed a proprietary, innovative and patented "FoneTrac" smart-phone system that performs the key function of accounting for attendees in

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## Site Selection



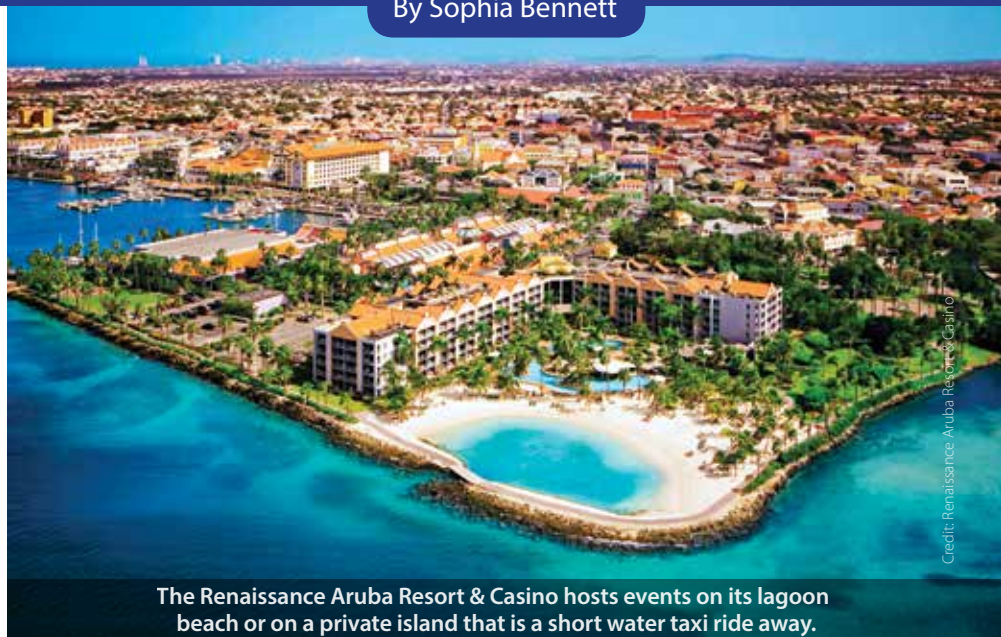
# Meet at the Beach

## A Welcome Break From the Ordinary

By Sophia Bennett

**B**each resorts mean warm sun, sparkling water, soft sand and, for most people, a welcome break from the ordinary. Add those elements together and you have the perfect equation for a memorable incentive trip or meeting.

Not all gatherings are appropriate for an oceanfront resort, however. Four corporate meeting planners share recent experiences at beach properties and their tips for other professionals looking to contract with similar venues. Any meeting at a beach should have the right balance between indoor and outdoor activities, and work and play time. And don't forget to create a contingency plan in case of rain.



The Renaissance Aruba Resort & Casino hosts events on its lagoon beach or on a private island that is a short water taxi ride away.



Credit: Naples Grande Beach Resort



Beach receptions (opposite and above) are grand at Naples Grande Beach Resort, which recently renovated all public spaces and ballroom. Surrounded by 200 acres of a protected mangrove estuary, the 474-room resort overlooks the Gulf of Mexico on Florida's southwest coast.

### Renaissance Aruba Resort & Casino, Oranjestad, Aruba

"One of our telecommunications clients holds an annual incentive trip for approximately 280 people," says Hillary Bamont, sales director for Bishop-McCann, a meeting and incentive travel planning firm in Kansas City, Missouri. "It's a four-day, three-night program and is typically held in a tropical location each year. The purpose of this trip is to reward top sellers and their guests with a fun-filled vacation filled with networking, relaxation and fun."

This year, the client decided to host their event at the Renaissance Aruba Resort & Casino. The island offered good air transportation to and from the U.S., and room rates at the property were in line with the company's budget. "We particularly liked the fact that this property owned its own private island, which we could rent out for a group event," Bamont says. "We like to provide attendees with experiences they can't necessarily get on their own."

The event consisted of a welcome reception, offsite events, optional activities such as a one-of-a-kind underwater photo booth, an awards dinner and plenty of time to lounge on the beach. Participants also could take part in several brand activations Bishop-McCann organized on-property.

"We strategically produced a sponsorship prospectus for this communications company that involved all their entertainment partners," Bamont

says. "That subsidized a good portion of the event."

Bishop-McCann ended up creating special activations for HBO, Showtime and others. Activities were centered on show content. For Showtime, attendees could learn about the hit show "Shameless" by visiting a temporary tattoo station. For HBO, guests were invited to play an interactive game called "Game of Drones" with real UAVs.

"As attractive as a beach location sounds, it's imperative to conduct a thorough site visit of the property at least six months or more before the event to ensure the property is well-maintained and staffed properly," Bamont says. "Experience the restaurants to make sure

who understand that is essential in making sure everything goes off flawlessly," Bamont says.

### Naples Grande Beach Resort, Naples, Florida

The 50-member composites team at Owens Corning is spread throughout the world, but once a year they come together to learn about business changes, share best practices and build camaraderie.

"Since I've been in this position, Florida has been the (meeting place) the majority of the time," says Lisa Cramer, a senior administrative assistant in Owens Corning's Toledo, Ohio, office. "It's beautiful and the weather is pretty

**"We particularly liked the fact that this property owned its own private island, which we could rent out for a group event."**

**Hillary Bamont, Sales Director**  
Bishop-McCann, South San Francisco, CA

the service is in line with what the group expects, stay in the rooms to make sure they meet the standards of the group, and talk to the staff and observe other groups and how they are being managed."

If you plan to hire a management company, it's smart to look for one that understands the ethos of workers at the destination. "The culture of island life is very different than our fast-paced culture in the states and hiring people

consistent. When we look at locations for this we want it to be something of a getaway even if there's a business aspect to it. But we do spend some time teambuilding and relaxing, so we want it to be pleasing for everyone."

This year the four-day event was at the Naples Grande Beach Resort in Florida. The property was able to accommodate all of their needs. A large ballroom, breakout rooms and outdoor meeting





The Wyndham Grand Rio Mar Beach Resort & Spa in Rio Grande, Puerto Rico features a one-mile beach, a large oceanfront conference center that can host up to 2,300 attendees, and several outdoor spaces for events such as this ocean terrace.

space provided a comfortable environment for participants. "The hotel offered some perks for internet access and provided PSAV at a discount," Cramer says. "They really worked with us to make it a win-win for both of us. The food was outstanding. We didn't know that going in, but we were very pleased with that."

"The director of events was extremely accommodating," Cramer adds. "The nature of our meetings — sometimes people change their plans at the last minute. I went in a day early, and we went over the agenda, and they accommodated everything. We had to receive some things for the meeting and that went off without a hitch. He definitely made an effort to extend himself and meet all our needs. He was very gracious. He made my job a lot easier."

Over the course of the meeting, attendees participated in meetings, attended an awards banquet, played golf and participated in other teambuilding activities. Cramer says it's important to find equilibrium between business and pleasure, especially at a beach location.

"When we were in our meetings there weren't windows, which was probably better," she says. "We were focused on our agenda and accomplishing what we needed to accomplish. But every time we had a break, people were heading out to the sunshine. It's a balance because you need to incorporate time enjoying the location with the business

content. But people are also there to build relationships and teambuild, so you incorporate that into your agenda so it's well-rounded."

Naples Grande completed a \$2 million remodel to their Vista Ballroom and Lobby Lounge in November 2016. The ballroom has new fixtures, drapery,

swelled to 550 once guests and other company staff were added. When she had a chance to tour the property during construction, she took it.

The Puerto Rico resort turned out to be an ideal venue. "The location and hotel really fit the bill for what we were trying to accomplish with the event," Cannady says. "It allowed (attendees) to stay



**"Every time we had a break, people were heading out to the sunshine. It's a balance because you need to incorporate time enjoying the location with the business content."**

**Lisa Cramer, Senior Administrative Assistant**  
Owens Corning, Toledo, OH

carpet, furniture and décor. The Lobby Lounge and Sprezzi Seating Area feature new seating, lighting and a complete bar upgrade.

#### Wyndham Grand Rio Mar Beach Resort & Spa, Puerto Rico

Heather Cannady, senior program manager for Andavo Meetings & Incentives in Greenwood Village, Colorado, a third-party planning company that focuses on corporate meetings and incentive travel, found the Wyndham Grand Rio Mar Beach Resort & Spa by chance. She's long worked with a cable company to plan an annual incentive trip for 250 of their top-performing employees. It was tough to find a property that could accommodate a group that

in the U.S. but feel like they were getting out of the country. ...Lots of the people who went on the trip had never left their hometowns, so going to a place that was very exotic was very exciting.

"The size of the property was also a perfect fit," Cannady continues. "We could have all 550 people at the same property, so we didn't need to do overflow rooms or anything like that. They had a great mixture of ballroom space and outdoor space."

The staff at the Grand Rio Mar is a real joy to work with, she says. Their convention service manager started out in a junior position and later became the head of the convention services department. "But he still did the convention services part for us because he didn't want any-

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# Floating Venues

One of the best things about being at the beach is getting out on the water. Why wait until after-hours to get guests into the ocean or other waterway? Here are some ideas for floating meetings and entertainment options.

**A three-hour tour.** Take guests on a cruise for a working (or non-working) meal. The Spirit of New York provides a three-hour dining and sightseeing experience that takes sailors past the Statue of Liberty, Brooklyn Bridge and other landmarks. The Creole Queen leaves the French Quarter in New Orleans and sails to historical sights such as Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and the Chalmette Battlefield. The Portland Spirit cruises up and down Oregon's scenic Willamette River, taking guests through the city center and out to more scenic areas. Groups of 15 can hop onboard the Water to Wine cruising tour on Upstate New York's Cayuga Lake, the longest of the Finger Lakes, with stops at three Finger Lakes wineries.



Credit: Water to Wine Tour

The Water to Wine Tour on New York's Cayuga Lake.

Credit: The Spirit of New York



The Spirit of New York offers a three-hour dining cruise.

**By raft or canoe.** Are smaller boats more attendees' speed? The Hilton Hawaiian Village allows groups to canoe to a private island in the middle of their Duke Kahanamoku Lagoon for lei-making and other teambuilding activities. Outfits such as Colorado Adventure Center and Pangaia Riv-

er Rafting in Montana can take teams on whitewater rafting trips designed to build leadership and teamwork skills.

**Build your own.** Multiple hotel and resort properties can arrange for event guests to build their own watercraft as a teambuilding activity. At Fort Lauderdale Marriott Harbor Beach Resort and Spa, people can participate in a "build a boat" challenge with the goal of getting an egg safely across a waterway. Hammock Beach Resort in Palm Coast, Florida, provides materials so pairs can build their own human-worthy boats (which are launched in the property's onsite lazy river).

**Lazy days.** When it's time to relax, get the whole group together to float on the open water. At the Hilton Orlando Buena Vista Palace, enjoy meditation classes or glow-in-the-



Credit: Hilton Hawaiian Village

A team canoe race at the Hilton Hawaiian Village Waikiki Beach Resort.



Credit: Celebrity Cruises

Rendering of the innovative "Magic Carpet" platform that will debut on the new Celebrity Edge in 2018.

dark cocktails on top of inner tubes placed in the property's lazy river. Several outfits in New Orleans offer opportunities to float down the region's rivers. Slather on the sunscreen, bring a cooler with water and adult beverages, and pass the afternoon with casual but meaningful conversation.

**Cruising on the Edge.** Of course the ultimate floating venue is an all-inclusive cruise ship. This spring, Celebrity Cruises announced its new Edge class of ships with advanced design features such as: a rooftop garden space for live music and an outdoor movie and dining experience; a moving "Magic Carpet" platform, that climbs up and down the outside of the 16-deck ship for spectacular views and experiences from entertainment to dining; and state rooms designed to "reach the water's edge." The first ship in the class, Celebrity Edge, sets sail in 2018, with three sister ships launching in 2020, 2021 and 2022.

— SB

one else to touch it," Cannady says. "We were his client."

At the beginning of the four-day event, attendees were divided into team-building groups that remained together throughout the course of the gathering. They worked on projects that were presented at a major event on the final day. In between, they attended two half-day

meetings, enjoyed the provided meals, and had plenty of time to relax. Several people made a road trip to the Puerto Rico capital of San Juan for an afternoon.

Beach locations are right for some meetings and not others, Cannady says. "If you have a full-on meeting at a beach resort and people are stuck inside all day, that's not very nice for them. I really

think everything depends on the client and what the client is looking for." Carefully consider your agenda and desired outcomes to determine what type of location best fits with those goals.

Many hotels in oceanfront cities aren't actually on the ocean, Cannady points out. If it's important that attendees have easy beach access, review how



California's Montage Laguna Beach offers four outdoor event lawns overlooking the Pacific Ocean and its dramatic coastline.



Credit: Montage Laguna Beach

they'll reach the sand during the initial site visit.

One of the things she likes about Puerto Rico is that it's consistently warm and dry. But rain can be an issue in tropical locations. Make sure the property can provide a tent or can move outdoor events inside if there's bad weather.

The Wyndham Grand Rio Mar recently updated its conference center. The Puerto Rico property worked with KNA Design to incorporate imagery found in the El Yunque National Rainforest, which is located in the northeastern part of the island. Spanish-style light fixtures and dark architectural elements such as beams and molding add a sophisticated element.

## Montage Laguna Beach, California

For the past three years *The Wall Street Journal* has hosted D.Live, a

three-day invitation-only technology event that brings 350 CEOs, investors, company founders and celebrities together on the West Coast. When your guest list includes the likes of media mogul Rupert Murdoch, businessman

**"Lots of the people who went on the trip had never left their hometowns, so going to a place that was very exotic was very exciting."**

**Heather Cannady**, Senior Program Manager  
Andavo Meetings & Incentives, Greenwood Village, CO

and "Shark Tank" TV personality Mark Cuban, rapper will.i.am and actress Kate Hudson, finding the right event venue is an absolute must.

Kelly Moneyhun, assistant director, conferences and events for *The Wall Street Journal*, has been very pleased with California's Montage Laguna

Beach. "It met expectations and went above and beyond," she says. "Their space works because it's nestled in an area that's off from the hotel, so you can be self-contained. But you do have a courtyard so you get the outside light

in some of the foyer space." An oceanfront lawn also provides an ideal space for dinners and other events.

The property's staff is also great to work with, Moneyhun says. Entertainment for the opening dinner one year was a drone symphony, where a handful of drones did a choreographed





Credits: Aulani, a Disney Resort & Spa

Aulani, a Disney Resort & Spa in Oahu, offers a 21,000-sf conference center and more than 76,000 sf of outdoor event space.

“dance” to music. The staff was very helpful in arranging permission for the drones to enter what’s typically off-limits air space. The hotel was willing to schedule multiple site visits, and able to accommodate the needs of VIP guests.

“When and if possible, it’s important to have as much of your meeting outside as you can,” Moneyhun says of beach meetings. “People are there for the content and speakers, but they’re there for the setting, too.”

If multiple events will be held outside, make sure the hotel truly has the capacity to comfortably accommodate

music and traditional Hawaiian dance, including hula kahiko and modern hula ‘auana. The show includes an entertaining storytelling experience that educates guests on Hawaii’s history and its deep cultural roots in canoe exploration, which brought Hawaiian ancestors to the beautiful ‘Ewa Loa plains surrounding Aulani Resort. Before the luau, guests can enjoy special pre-show entertainment, traditional crafts and more.

As part of the Ko Olina Resort Community & Marina, Aulani guests have access to a 330-slip marina and 18

front private estate dinner; surfing; Hawaii volcano adventure and more.

Aulani’s 21,000-sf conference center includes a main ballroom, four breakout rooms and generous prefunction space. Meetings and conventions also enjoy two distinct event lawns, along with private patios and terraces. In total, Aulani Resort offers more than 76,000 sf of outdoor space.

Situated on the beach between the Atlantic Ocean and Intracoastal Waterway, The Diplomat Beach Resort in Hollywood, Florida, offers 209,000 sf of meeting space, a new full-service spa overlooking the ocean, and an 18-hole championship golf course managed by Troon Golf. The resort recently completed a \$100 million transformation that touched all 1,000 guest rooms, and indoor and outdoor public spaces. There are now 10 dining options on the property, including burger joint Bristol’s Burgers, grab-and-go store Counter Point, and The Hotel Bar, a modern take on the classic hotel bar.

Atlantis, Paradise Island resort in The Bahamas will finish renovations the Coral Towers section of the property this July. Rooms have new furniture, flooring, bedding and bathroom fixtures. A redesigned lobby centers around the Soda Fountain, which serves sweet treats, coffee, cocktails and pastries. The refreshed pool area has private cabanas, family-friendly water activities, and a poolside bar. Renovations to Marina Village, located in another section of the property, will be finished this fall. **C&IT**

**“It’s important to have as much of your meeting outside as you can. People are there for the content and speakers, but they’re there for the setting, too.”**

**Kelly Moneyhun**, Assistant Director, Conference and Events  
*The Wall Street Journal*, New York, NY

everyone in your group. They should also have a backup plan in case of bad weather. “There’s nothing worse than being at a beautiful resort and it rains and you can’t do anything about it,” Moneyhun says. Keeping attendees out of the rain means they’ll have only sunshine-filled memories of their time in paradise.

### More Beachy Options

Aulani, a Disney Resort & Spa located on 21 oceanfront acres in Ko Olina on the western side of Oahu, debuted the Ka Wa’a luau last fall. The luau treats attendees to a local island buffet, with

holes of championship golf at Ko Olina Golf Club, one of *Golf Digest’s* “Top 75 Resort Courses in the U.S.” and designed by renowned golf course architect Ted Robinson.

Laniwai — meaning freshwater heaven — a Disney Spa, features Kula Wai, the only outdoor hydrotherapy garden on the island of Oahu. The spa has 18,000 sf indoors and 5,000 sf outdoors.

Groups can participate in uniquely Hawaiian experiences such as Rainbow Reef, the only private snorkeling lagoon on O’ahu; a dolphin swim adventure; Pearl Harbor excursion; ocean-

## A whole new world of “Memorable events.”

Aulani, A Disney Resort & Spa, will make powerful connections with your attendees. It’s a celebration of Hawaiian culture, history and tradition that’s the perfect location for meetings and incentives. Set on the pristine western coastline of Oahu on the beautiful beaches of Ko Olina, this 21-acre oceanfront resort offers more than 76,000 square feet of stunning outdoor venues and a 21,000 square foot conference center. And all of it – the space, the support and the programming – is fully customizable. Add to that the award-winning Laniwai Spa, fine dining and shopping, world-class Disney entertainment, Ko Olina Marina, an 18-hole championship golf course and the comfort of 832 rooms you’ve got everything you could want to create an unforgettable experience for your attendees.



AULANI CONFERENCE CENTER	
KAIONA BALLROOM	4,590 SQ FT
KA'ALA BALLROOM	2,885 SQ FT
COVERED PRE-FUNCTION	4,715 SQ FT
KIPUKA LAWN	5,195 SQ FT
KIPUKA COURTYARD	3,633 SQ FT
NA'AUAO ROOM	240 SQ FT

<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>21,258 SQ FT</b>
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OUTDOOR VENUES	
WAILANA POOL	9,250 SQ FT
RAINBOW REEF PATIO	1,766 SQ FT
KULA WAI	3,000 SQ FT
KA MAKA LANDING	16,000 SQ FT
HALAWAI LAWN	21,800 SQ FT
AULANI BEACH	20,000+*SQ FT
'AMA'AMA PATIO	4,869 SQ FT
'AMA'AMA VERANDA	
ALOHI POINT	

<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>76,685 SQ FT</b>
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# The Latest and Greatest Tech Tools

'Understanding Technology Diminishes Fear of It'

By Derek Reveron



**T**wenty-five years ago, even a decade ago, it was difficult to imagine that so many meeting planning pros would use — let alone depend on — smartphones, apps and social media to set up and conduct meetings.

And, whether we like it or not, expect the dependency on technology to continually increase. It won't be long before planners will routinely use today's emerging technologies on a consistent basis. And if planners don't jump on the bandwagon, experts suggest they will face a reduction in such areas as ROI, attendance, efficiency and engagement.

In spite of that advice, adoption among meeting planners remains gradual at best. About 60 percent of planners claim they understand and appreciate event management technology tools, but more than 70 percent say they devote less than one-fourth of their time using

the tools, according to a study by Meeting Professionals International (MPI). Nearly 70 percent say they still depend on traditional processes such as spreadsheets to organize meeting data.

One of the main reasons planners fail to learn and adopt new technologies is the lack of time to devote to every new option, explains Jeff Rasco, CMP, the founder and CEO of Attendee Management Inc., a Wimberley, Texas-based meeting and event planning firm. "Planners are seldom in control of the budgets sometimes required to implement the latest and greatest technologies," says Rasco. "Technology has to be learned and managed — just one more thing on our overflowing plates. Often technology is thrown at planners with little time allotted for training, and user adoption becomes the No. 1 obstacle to success."

Nevertheless, experts such as Corbin Ball,

CMP, CSP, founder of Corbin Ball Associates, a meeting technology consulting firm in Bellingham, Washington, suggests adoption of new technologies is inevitable partly because of their proliferation. "The rate of technology change is accelerating with thousands of ideas, apps and innovations bubbling up to help meeting planners, exhibitors, venues and other meeting participants to do their jobs better and improve the attendee experience," Ball says.

## There's an App for That

Among the thousands of apps, there are hundreds dedicated to meeting and event planning. They are becoming even more numerous and sophisticated partly because so many Americans use mobile devices. According to the Pew Research Center, 95 percent of Americans now own a cellphone of some kind,

and 77 percent own a smartphone (which was 35 percent in 2011 when Pew conducted its first survey).

Brandt Krueger, owner of Richfield, Minnesota-based Event Technology Consulting, suggests the heavy smartphone use among planners and attendees is why more and more meetings have their own apps now. "By far, the No. 1 use of mobile right now is the event app," says Krueger. "It's funny to think back to the time when that was considered leading-edge technology, and now we've reached the point where even the smallest meetings and events are just expected to have a mobile app."

There is an app for practically every task planners must tackle before, during and after meetings. Apps can purchase airline tickets; register attendees; book rooms and dining reservations; and help with RFPs as well as hotel



and venue selection. Planners can use apps to track and schedule myriad tasks, create reports and share files.

Apps also provide programs and update changes (saving a great deal of paper and time); allow attendees to network before, during and after meetings; provide games and teambuilding activities; and survey attendees. Event check-in apps can help planners move lines more rapidly through registration stations, track attendee arrival numbers and identify VIPs.

Planners can even use apps to create another app designed specifically for a meeting. Such apps can be costly as well as time consuming for attendees to learn how to use. Therefore, apps that can be used at more than one event deliver the most value. Also, some people don't want to download an app they may only use once.

Social media apps remain a strong and growing part of mobile usage among planners and attendees. "Twitter has faded a bit, but photo-



**Jeff Rasco**  
Founder and CEO  
Attendee Management Inc.  
Wimberley, TX

***"Plan for the time and energy it will take to learn the tools well enough to manage them. Understanding technology diminishes fear of it."***

sharing on Instagram and SnapChat are still quite popular," says Krueger. "Know your audience and where they are interacting with each other. Be there."

#### **Online Registration**

Online registration systems are among the fastest-growing meeting technologies. Planners can register attendees with apps and customized software systems, and design their own templates for specific meetings. The tools track registration numbers in real time, generate reports, and sign up attendees for sessions and events.

Despite the efficiency of online registration systems, many planners still don't use them. "Though online registration has pretty much become the norm, there are still a lot of planners using Microsoft Excel and Word as primary planning tools," says Krueger. "It's hard to justify the cost and learning time for something that may or may not work for you and your team. It's why I encourage event technology providers to have low-cost or free starter plans that work for multiple events. It might take you two or three events to figure out if a tool is right for you."

#### **Integrated Planning Tools**

The number of event software tools has grown to more than 1,700 since planners started using them in the mid-1990s. The tools are largely distinct, non-integrated systems. An integrated system that handles all aspects of planning from beginning to end would be easier for planners to buy, learn and use. However, building a one-size-fits-all software product is difficult because meetings, trade shows, incentive programs and special events all have their own different needs.

That's partly why progress has been slow in developing integrated systems. "Data integration has simply not been an easy task," says Ball. "Over the years, they continued to slowly improve into a wide assortment of online event systems to manage registration, exhibits, housing, room blocks, membership, event website analytics, budgeting, sourcing and more. However, for much of this time, these data sources remained in silos as they have been difficult to share between systems."

Many of the larger event technology providers are providing their tools as part of a suite of non-integrated technology offerings. For example, Lanyon's Active Network includes the following separate, non-integrated products: Starcite (sourcing and strategic meetings management software); RegOnline (attendee management); and Passkey (room block management). Cvent's offerings include Crowdcompass (mobile event app); OnArrival (check-ins); and Elite Meetings/Speed RFP.

Integration is improving with the help of tech firms offering cloud-based planning software that is compatible with other systems. The systems on the cloud, a network of servers, combine functions such as registration, room blocks, housing, membership, budgeting and sourcing. Examples include Eventbrite (registration, invitations); EventGeek (logistics, budgeting and

meeting analytics software); and Etouches (16 compatible event planning modules).

#### **Virtual Reality**

Experts predict that the future of meeting planning will be forever changed and enhanced by the still developing virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) tools that are showing up more and more these days.

VR offers three-dimensional walk-throughs of properties and full visualization of décor, lighting and seating arrangements. "Imagine walking into an empty ballroom, donning a pair of AR glasses, and having the convention sales manager walk you through various setup options for a space, including call-outs for power, overlays for ceiling height, rigging points and other technical specifics," says Krueger. Virtual site visits won't replace physical ones, but they may help eliminate a venue or two by reducing the number of in-person visits, saving time and money."

Currently, VR developers such as Samsung, Microsoft and Google are spearheading VR research and showcasing its uses at industry events and trade shows. Eventually, VR is likely to help increase attendee engagement and increase planning and site selection efficiency.

One day, planners, properties and CVBs will commonly use VR for virtual site visits and destination tours. The trend has started already. For example, Shangri-La Hotels offers Oculus Rift VR site inspection tours; the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority provides Vegas VR, a downloadable tour of local sites; and Destination BC (Vancouver, British Columbia) recently launched The Wild Within VR Experience, using Oculus Rift technology, making it the first destination marketing organization in North America to use virtual reality to promote the destination. The Wild Within VR Experience is an interactive, three-dimensional video that allows travelers to experience British Columbia in a truly immersive way, as if they were actually there.

#### **Engagement**

New tech tools also provide ways to measure attendee engagement and for good reason as engaged attendees are more likely to learn and retain knowledge, interact more with presenters and other attendees, and return to events.

Social media tools help measure engagement via surveys and monitoring the number of meeting-related posts, tweets, views, pic-

tures and videos. Mobile event apps can track attendee engagement via networking and participation in sessions, activities and games both online and offline.

Audience response technology can increase engagement by allowing attendees to anonymously and honestly ask questions in real time during events.

**Brandt Krueger**  
Owner  
Event Technology Consulting  
Richfield, MN



***"I encourage event technology providers to have low-cost or free starter plans that work for multiple events. It might take you two or three events to figure out if a tool is right for you."***

The technology can sometimes be a bit challenging for meeting stakeholders. "At one corporate meeting I was working, management was hammering home the importance of workplace diversity and their commitment to it," says Krueger. "An anonymous respondent said he was uncomfortable with the level of diversity and asked what he should do. The CEO explained that diversity was a company core value and that anyone uncomfortable with it probably shouldn't be working there. For better or worse, that's a conversation that probably wouldn't have happened using traditional two-microphones-in-the-audience Q&A."

#### **Video and Live Streaming**

Live streaming is growing by leaps and bounds mainly for two reasons: It allows long-distance participation in practically every aspect of meetings from keynotes and seminars to networking and games. More properties and venues are featuring the high bandwidth connections, software and equipment necessary for live streaming.

Live streaming grows as more social media services provide the technology and continue



to improve it. Social media providers such as Facebook Live, Facebook Instant Video, Instagram, Snapchat and Periscope continue to enhance their technology, offering planners more avenues for video sharing.

### Biometrics

Technology will eventually allow planners to use biometric systems to ascertain attendee information. "Technology has developed to the point where face recognition systems can determine attendees' gender, approximate age, ethnicity, mood and even specific individuals in a photo database," says Ball. "Postings on social media can be analyzed for sentiment as well. We will see these tools used at events and exhibitions to measure engagement, de-



**Corbin Ball**  
CMP, CSP  
Founder  
Corbin Ball Associates  
Bellingham, WA

***"Technology has developed to the point where face recognition systems can determine attendees' gender, approximate age, ethnicity, mood and even specific individuals in a photo database."***

mographics, sentiment and even spot potential troublemakers."

Examples of the systems, says Ball, include CrowdStats Audience Analytics, which offers "real-time insights into your audience behavior and interests." The system analyzes "faces of an audience, collects the above-mentioned data, and presents the processed results in an intuitive dashboard in the Cloud." Other companies in this area include Visage Technologies and Mood.me.

### Slow Adoption

Experts say that adoption among planners will improve, albeit slowly. According to the MPI study, planners are discouraged from using new technologies for several reasons, such as:

- They have negative experiences with technology.
- They lack access to dependable Wi-Fi.
- They are discouraged by bugs in the technology or the inability to integrate it with other platforms.
- They can't or don't want to keep up with technology because it advances so rapidly.
- They also fear something may go wrong with a new technology.

"Because much of what we do requires us to get it right in one shot, it's natural that planners might shy away from trying new things," says Krueger. "It creates a Catch 22. If we can't find ways to test technology at scale during live events, we can't ever know for sure if it's going to work properly or fix any bugs that might come up. And if there's even a chance it's not going to work properly, planners are going to be reluctant to use it at their events."

### Education Needed

Planners who educate themselves about event technology are most likely to overcome roadblocks to adoption. Experts advise that planners continuously network, socialize and ask questions about event technology. "Find out what other people use and what they like and dislike," says Krueger. "Look for education opportunities at industry events and look at the tools planners use for those events. Our industry has been a word-of-mouth industry for a long time. That hasn't changed in the digital age. Ask for references when considering new technologies."

Rasco offers this advice: "You need to understand the systems well enough to work within them, but trying to do it all yourself only distracts from the primary focus of planning and executing your meetings," says Rasco. "Read, take courses, attend webinars as you can, subscribe to newsletters from industry experts, get a technology mentor and definitely plan for the time and energy it will take to learn the tools well enough to manage them. Understanding technology diminishes fear of it."

Despite the growth of technology such as live streaming and videoconferencing, experts say that the opportunities for networking, brainstorming and relationship building are still greater at face-to-face meetings than online.

On the other hand, the use of new technologies is likely to enrich and enhance meetings by helping to keep attendees engaged, entertained and informed. **C&IT**

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# Building Relationships

Bringing  
People Together  
Is Vital to  
Business Success

By Maura Keller

Marketing executives use it as a key tool for their success. Business consultants use it to obtain new clients and often make it a key part of their overall strategies. Meeting and event planners see it as a necessary effort to expand their business. What is it? It's networking, and in the world of business, people network to help smooth out the potholes on the road to success. For Christy Lamagna, CMP, CMM, CTSM, founder of Strategic Meetings & Events in New York City, networking is about starting relationships.

"If you approach it with a sales goal in mind you are cheating yourself and others out of the processes' full potential," Lamagna says. "Our audiences are becoming more savvy so we need deeper and broader partner networks so we can innovate, collaborate and inspire our guests. The deeper the bench, the more options we can offer."



**"The best networking opportunities are outside formal networking functions when conversation can flow more naturally. I like planes and charity events."**



**Christy Lamagna, CMP, CMM, CTSM**  
Founder, Strategist  
Strategic Meetings & Events  
New York, NY

## Making Connections

Building social relationships is the foundation of any kind of organized society. Only in the last half of the 20th century did it become something that people did deliberately. The famous book *How to Win Friends & Influence People* was published in 1936 and, in great part, was all about networking, but author Dale Carnegie never once uses that word in his book. Susan RoAne and Bob Burg began speaking on the topic in the 1980s — actually calling it “networking,” and both published two of the first books on the topic.

Today, networking has evolved to incorporate social networking as it’s called when using social media. The two not only can, but should work hand-in-hand.

“The best networking opportunities are outside formal networking functions when conversation can flow more naturally,” Lamagna says. “I like planes, especially business class, and charity events — anywhere you are standing is a potential conversation.”

According to Susan Smolarek, event planner and director of group sales at Visit Lake Geneva (Wisconsin), part of her role as an event planner means that she recognizes the vital role networking plays within the industry.

“While we have a great deal of technology that allows for communicating long distance, the value of bringing people together face-to-face is still vital to business success today,” Smolarek says. “There is something stronger gained when a face-to-face connection occurs.”

As Smolarek explains, planning the networking component of an event requires just as much strategic forethought as the rest of the event. For example, what is the amount of time dedicated to networking in comparison to the rest of the agenda? What’s the mix of structured and non-structured networking?

“Add creativity to networking versus just providing the standard cocktail hour for networking,” Smolarek says. “Consider speed dating, round-table discussion tables, incorporating the use of social media platforms and team competitions such as scavenger hunts for certain attendees.”

Networking has evolved from large-scale events where people walk around trading business cards to more intimate atmospheres where people can truly get to know one another.

“People are starting to value more authentic ways of getting to know people,” says Jenny Powers, founder and CEO at Running With Heels LLC in New York City. “With the amount we all spend in front of computers and looking at our phones, face-to-face networking has become more critical. Social media networking is fine for introductions but once those have occurred its time to get off the URL and meet IRL (in real life).”

Indeed, before technology, networking was more face-to-face and less global. With technology, networking has become more global and outreach easier. However, as Gail Tolstoi-Miller, CEO and chief staffing strategist of Consultnetworx in Livingston, New Jersey, and author of *Networking Karma: How Today's Cutting Edge Networking Trends Can Help You Connect and Conquer*, (Consultnetworx, 2016) explains, with technology there are some downsides, hiding behind the technology and not having the motivation to interact with others face-to-face or relating on an empathetic level.

“The younger generation looks down too much at their phones and has lost the ability to interface in person on a more personal level, including making eye contact,” Tolstoi-Miller says.

And how has in-person networking evolved to incorporate social media networking? Can they work hand-in-hand? Using social media and in-person networking is really leveraging networking to the fullest.

“It is knowing how to use technology to connect with others, then taking it to the next level and meet in person or have a FaceTime meeting,” Tolstoi-Miller says. “It is easy to get caught up in joining LinkedIn groups, Facebook pages or having a million connections, but if you don’t become an active participant, it all means nothing.”

## Know Where to Go

The key to successful networking is to go where your prospective clients, existing clients and competitors go. If you are looking for high-end clients to book your luxury venue, don’t go to a Meet-Up. Go to a higher priced ticketed event where your target market will be.

“Most networking takes place at events that aren’t actually positioned as ‘networking’ events,” Powers says.

And remember, networking is 24/7. It is about being aware of your surroundings and having the ability to have great listening skills. “So if you hear someone talking about their upcoming wedding then you need to have the ability to politely join the conversation.



**Beth Bridges**  
Author, Speaker, Trainer  
The Networking Motivator  
Clovis, CA

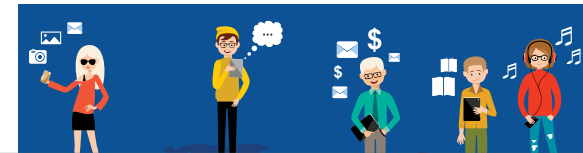
**"One or two at most will stay connected with you over time, especially when you're at a distance. Keep that in mind...and you won't be disappointed afterwards."**

# What Type of Communicator Are You?

Communication experts recognize many different communication styles that can affect your networking efforts. If you have difficulty communicating, or if people seem to have trouble communicating with you, it might be helpful to read the following four descriptions to see if you can identify what type of communicator you are. Once you realize how you tend to communicate with others, you can pinpoint which techniques are not effective for you and how you might change them.

- **Connector.** This type of person is easy-going, loyal and empathetic. They dislike people who are aggressive or assertive. Stability is the “hot button” for this type of communicator. They need to keep things evenly flowing, and they typically accomplish this through personal courtesy. It is sometimes difficult for them to share their own thoughts or feelings.
- **Networker.** This type of communicator is outgoing, but not very detail-oriented. They thrive on chaos and how they connect to others. Recognition is very important to them, and they are conscious of all of the people around them.
- **Producer.** This person is geared toward getting to the result. They are extremely goal-oriented and like to get things done. They tend to eliminate chitchat and other idle conversations in order to get to the point and accomplish things faster.
- **Analyzer.** This type of communicator thrives on exact information. They rely heavily on accuracy and ask many precise questions in order to achieve it. They need to thoroughly evaluate all aspects of a situation before taking any steps to complete a project or resolve an issue.

— MK



versation. Some of the best networking is not done at networking events but on the grocery line, your kid’s soccer game or airport,” Tolstoi-Miller says.

Beth Bridges, author of *Networking on Purpose: A Five-Part Success Plan to Build a Powerful and Profitable Business Network* (iBridge Enterprises, 2013) and founder of The Networking Motivator in Clovis, California, explains that meeting and event planners need to go where people are like-minded. “This doesn’t mean people who are the same as you, it means people who are there to meet people and build relationships, too,” Bridges says. “Chamber of commerce and association meetings are some of the best because they are designed and promoted as networking organizations or at least as a source of those opportunities.”

Conferences can be very good as well. Here’s what Bridges has learned from attending many events across the country: “Yes, you’ll meet a lot of people. And you should connect with them at the event and follow up with connecting on social media. But, you’ll probably only stick with one or two people after an event.

“In other words, you’ll talk to and connect with perhaps dozens of people,” Bridges says. “One or two at most will stay connected with you over time, especially when you’re at a distance. Keep that in mind when you attend

these events and you won’t be disappointed afterwards.”

## Key Steps to Take

Some key ways to make the most out of your networking efforts:

- **Develop your contact spheres.** These are a groups of business professionals who have a symbiotic or compatible, noncompetitive relationship with you. In any networking situation look to make two to three solid contacts with whom you can learn something special about the other person — both from a personal and business perspective. Do not just hop from one person to the next trying to collect as many business cards as possible —that is counter-productive.
- **Diversify, diversity, diversify.** You need breadth and depth. Participate in different kinds of groups. A diverse personal network enables you to increase the possibility of including connectors, or linchpins, in your network. Linchpins are people who in some way cross over between two or more clusters or groups of individuals. In effect, they have overlapping interests or contacts that allow them to link groups of people together easily. For example, consider networking with people in the community who are meeting oth-

ers including realtors, bankers and insurance people. You also should consider networking with companies with a common connection to your products and services.

- **Share new ideas.** When networking, you adopt new methods for success within your own position through the sharing of new ideas and approaches to issues. Everyone is always looking for new ideas and concepts. Lend your expertise.
- **Find your niche.** You need to find your niche and the people who fit your business. You know your product and you also hopefully know the people who need your product or service. Once you find your market, concentrate on becoming involved, be a regular so they see your face constantly, and be reliable. You are your product. If they trust you and your dependability, it shows them that your company also is dependable.
- **Create a feeling of trust.** Experts agree that the approach to networking must be about building relationships based on providing value and gaining the trust of others. It is not about getting immediate business. Not enough business owners realize this, and they go into networking with the mindset of getting business instead of building relationships.



- **Be very specific about what referrals you want.** Identify specific people to whom you wish to be introduced. Personal introductions can open doors for you that would've otherwise remained closed. If you don't know the name of the manager of another business you wish to meet, find out — then ask specifically for a referral to that person.
- **Meet with each person in your networking circle one-on-one.** To deepen the relationship, meet with each person away from the general networking session, to dial up the focus of your networking efforts.

To really maximize the energy of the partnership you're forging with your referral sources, it's critical to spend time with them. Just going to a social function or sitting side-by-side at some type of conference or networking event isn't enough. You have to be face-to-face, talking and exploring commonalities and complimentary aspects of each of your businesses to be as powerful a referral source for each other as you can be.

As the vice president of brand strategy at J Public Relations, one of the country's top luxury travel PR agencies, Amy Ogden works with hotels and resorts across the globe.

"One of my networking recommendations is to arrive early," Ogden says. "This is easily my favorite networking tip. Arriving early allows you to slowly and confidently meet people as they arrive — when they are seeking some-

one to chat with. Over the course of the event you end up being the 'mayor' of the room. You know many of the guests and end up introducing new people to the mix. Even the most talented networker's heart skips a beat when they walk into a crowded and loud room. Arriving early takes away the anxiety and sets you up for success."

Ogden also recommends that you have real conversations. Don't look at every guest as a dollar sign. "I excel at networking because I legitimately love meeting new people," Ogden says. "Some women I've met at networking events are now my closest friends today. Take a real interest in the person. The business comes later."

Finally, follow up. When Ogden has a networking event, she schedules time the next day for focused follow-up. This is often a quick email connecting or setting a coffee or lunch meeting.

"It sounds obvious, but if you don't follow up, you may as well have skipped the event altogether," Ogden says. "Follow-up is everything."

### On the Horizon

The future of networking will continue to focus and emphasize the importance of face-to-face events.

"These days instead of hopping on a call, more and more people are connecting via Skype or Facetime. Seeing someone's facial expressions, gestures and body language is such an integral part of the communication process, and in this era of technology, people are hungry for human contact," Powers says.

Networking will further evolve through members-only groups, social clubs and in terms of technology, Powers believes more apps will begin to appear, connecting people by interest, need and geographical location the way dating sites already do.



**"It is easy to get caught up in joining LinkedIn groups, Facebook pages, or having a million connections, but if you don't become an active participant, it all means nothing."**

**Gail Tolstoi-Miller**  
CEO and Chief Staffing Strategist  
Consultnetworx  
Livingston, NJ

Bridges says new and evolving technology will make it much easier to keep track of who you know and will help remind you of who you need to reach out to. It also means you will never have an excuse for forgetting someone's name.

"Your glasses could scan someone's face and remind you of their name, company, the last time you saw them and what they've recently accomplished in their business," Bridges says. "On the negative side, it could make interaction a little less sincere. So as the software evolves, make sure that you add as much genuine humanity and authenticity as you can to your networking activities."

Technology will continue allowing people to connect in an easier and faster way. "But as technology continues to expand, my concern is our ability to connect with others on a human and empathetic level by hiding behind our computer or phone," Tolstoi-Miller says. "I don't want the next generation to lose the effective communication skills and emotional intelligence that makes us evolve as humans."

Lamagna agrees. "Networking is assisted by technology but planners need to remember that just as the events we plan are predominantly live, networking should be, too," Lamagna says. "Nothing can replace face-to-face connections and interactions. Our audiences are becoming more savvy so we need deeper and broader partner networks so we can innovate, collaborate and inspire our guests. The deeper the bench, the more options we can offer." **C&IT**

**"Seeing someone's facial expressions, gestures and body language is such an integral part of the communication process... people are hungry for human contact."**



**Jenny Powers**  
Founder and CEO  
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The intimate courtyard of Broussard's, an iconic New Orleans restaurant since 1920.

# New Orleans

By DAVID SWANSON

From the Culinary & Music Scenes to Its Cultural Heritage, the Crescent City Delivers Inspirational & Memorable Meetings

For many visitors, cuisine is what defines the New Orleans experience. Creole, Cajun and Southern soul cooking form the culinary backbone, but the city's sophisticated denizens have successfully lured fine chefs from other regions to set up shop and develop a food scene that is smart and trend-defying. Others will point to the city's robust cultural heritage, where the collision of French, Spanish and African influences produce one of America's most distinct societies.

Some will reflect on the architecture of New Orleans — the French Quarter, the Garden District, the elevated European-style cemeteries — as defining what makes this city so special. And New Orleans' musical heritage is undeniable: The Crescent City was the birthplace of jazz, and today the clubs and other venues remain well-stocked with a long roster of full-time musicians who happily share their craft with visitors.

Individually or in tandem, these are among the attributes that can be woven into a successful meeting program in this great Southern city. They are among the assets that will distinguish a New Orleans gathering from the location of any previous setting meeting groups may have experienced.

Consider the plans Hosts New Orleans president Terry Epton, CIS, CITE, DMCP, is finalizing for the HGA Global Forum in June.

"The city has so many things to choose from, and if you have a mediocre event you'll lose your attendees," explains Epton. "One of the key things we want to include at the Hosts Global Forum is New Orleans music in all its forms. In coordination with Cara Banasch from the CVB we've decided to use jazz as a common thread that flows through the entire forum. It will range from school children performing to

award-winning performance groups, but there won't be any commercial jazz plug-ins.

"One night we'll have Mardi Gras Indians with two tribes coming together at Jackson Square, followed by a jazz performance by Kermit Ruffins and Grammy-winner Irving Mayfield at Le Petit Théâtre Du Vieux Carré, the oldest community theater in America. After the performance, we'll reveal a courtyard next door which leads into the restaurant Tableau, where we will use the entire facility. After dinner, we'll do another parade featuring imbedded street performers.

"They're going to get a taste of what life in New Orleans is like," adds Epton. "But you need an awesome DMC to pull this off, a company that's tapped into the local scene, to be able to get this kind of quality experience."

Fortunately, not only does New Orleans have locally based DMCs, but the city's convention and visitors bureau encourages a dialogue during the sales process, to tap into the city's wealth of heritage.

## The CVB Is a Great Partner

"We have so many resources we can customize, so for something like music we find out, what are the goals," says Cara Banasch, MBA, senior vice president of sales and strategy for the New Orleans Convention and Visitors Bureau. "For instance, we identify where are the places we can drop in music as a surprise-and-delight moment. Most of our musi-

cians are from New Orleans, and they can create a very authentic, welcome statement at the start of a meeting. At a coffee break, as long as it's not too loud, why not have it as an enhancement, or to transition from one space to the next? Second lines and brass bands can also be integrated into almost any movement — it gets groups away from air horns and xylophones."

We already know New Orleans as a one-of-a-kind in America, but these are the kind of localized touches that make the city a memorable convention and meeting destination. And the numbers bear that out.

In 2016, visitors spent \$7.41 billion dollars in New Orleans, a 5.1 percent increase over the visitor spending record set in 2015. The city hosted a record-breaking 10.45 million visitors in 2016, the highest number since 2004 and a 6.9 percent increase compared to 2015. The meeting business appears to be growing apace.

"In 2015 we did about 300 corporate events," says Banasch. "In 2016, we were up by about 10 percent, and for 2017 so far we're already up about 20 percent."

Over the years, New Orleans has repeatedly had to rediscover and renew itself, most notably following the devastation of Hurricane Katrina in 2006. As Banasch explains: "There's been a necessity to reinvent ourselves, and through that, we've become one of the premiere hubs for entrepreneurialism and start-ups. We've always had a lot of locally

"The city has so many things to choose from, and if you have a mediocre event you'll lose your attendees. One of the key things we want to include...is New Orleans music in all its forms. ...We've decided to use jazz as a common thread that flows through the entire forum."

**Terry Epton**, CIS, CITE, DMCP, President  
Hosts New Orleans  
New Orleans, LA





owned businesses and boutiques — when you're buying clothing or art, you're often buying it from the person who owns the store, or maybe even designed it.

"In the corporate world you hear about reinvention and disruption. But when you think about it, that's what New Orleans is about, and I think a lot of businesses look to us as a space where they can take inspiration from the local culture."

One asset destined for reinvention is the Louis Armstrong New Orleans International Airport. An all-new, nearly \$1 billion state-of-the-art terminal for the airport is under construction and set to open in early 2019. Originally planned for 30 gates, in January the city announced the airport would construct an additional five gates to accommodate



Credit: Associated Luxury Hotels International

In the heart of the French Quarter, Hotel Monteleone's iconic Carousel Bar & Lounge has been revolving since 1949.

increasing demand, which has led to a 7 percent increase in seats into the airport this year. In March, British Airways launched a nonstop flight from London-Heathrow; in May, Condor Airlines debuted a seasonal flight from Frankfurt.

### Access and Service Are Key

That kind of access is vital for many of the corporate groups New Orleans seeks to lure, and it was a key reason the city was a good fit for Sheila Fuzy, president of Fishers, Indiana-based Fuzion Training, Marketing and Communications, who has organized several programs for a luxury automotive manufacturer in the city, most recently in May.

"New Orleans was the perfect location for these events, as it is centrally located," explains Fuzy. "The majority of our participants were able to travel in on direct flights."

But another part of the equation for Fuzy was identifying a meeting property she could partner with over successive events, and she found it in the Hotel Monteleone, where she says the entire team was "committed to assisting us in executing our vision." That vision involved a number of unique requirements.

"I'll give you a few examples," says Fuzy. "For the first program we worked with the hotel on, we decided to have a parade with our clients' vehicles. We conducted the parade eight times over the course of the time that we were there.

This required us to work closely with the hotel as they had all of the contacts we needed, ranging from city permitting to close down Royal Street, Canal Street and Bourbon Street, to sourcing bands, dancers, etc.

"In addition, we had a vision for the dinner reception that was a bit different than what the hotel's catering team had executed in the past. We wanted it to be very free-flowing, so guests could mingle while enjoying local cuisine. The hotel executed flawlessly. There were various stations set up in the ballroom that allowed guests to sample at their leisure versus in a traditional sit-down dinner.

"For the second event," Fuzy continues, "our concept was to project a map on the building across the street, and the Hotel Monteleone again jumped into action. We had to remove several windows in the building in order to accommodate the projection equipment. In addition, the hotel assisted in working with the owner of the building to set up a lease agreement to utilize the property to display our client's products. This required removal of storefront glass, and permitting to shut down Royal Street. We also used the marquee above the hotel to showcase our band. This was something that had not been done before.

"Sometime hotel properties are hesitant to let you do things like this," adds Fuzy. "The Hotel Monteleone was all about helping us figure out how to make it happen."

Built in 1886 on Royal Street in the heart of the French Quarter, the 570-room Monteleone offers more than 24,000 sf of meeting space, ranging from breakout rooms to the 6,236-sf La Nouvelle Orleans Ballroom. The hotel's famed, 25-seat Carousel Bar has been revolving since 1949 while standards spin — live.

"The event spaces at the Hotel Monteleone are traditional New Orleans, but also allow you a canvas to create a vision," says Fuzy. "The hotel rooms are again traditional, but upscale and luxurious." But it's the service and level of professionalism that Fuzy says keep her coming back.

"The entire team at the Hotel Monteleone is absolutely amazing. Sales Manager Lisa Thompson is simply one of the best in the business, and I cannot say enough about how thorough Lisa is or the attention to detail she provides. I've been doing this for 25 years, and she is one of the best I've ever encountered. Kent, Keith and Edie also were an absolute pleasure to work with. Their commitment to ensuring our event was a success was unparalleled and greatly appreciated. I truly feel like the entire staff was an extension of our team. From the front desk, to the doormen, valet staff, chef and catering team."

### Strict Standards of Excellence

Another group that had stringent meeting requirements was Illycaffè, the Italian coffee roaster, which held their annual North American commercial meeting for a group of 100 in New Orleans in 2016.

"Illycaffè is very exclusive brand, and they will only go to venues that rep their company, either through a café inside,



**"Most of our musicians are from New Orleans, and they can create a very authentic, welcome statement at the start of a meeting. At a coffee break, as long as it's not too loud, why not have it as an enhancement, or to transition from one space to the next?"**

**Cara Banasch**, MBA, Senior V.P. of Sales and Strategy  
New Orleans Convention and Visitors Bureau  
New Orleans, LA

or in their banquet rooms," explains Michelle Johnson, owner of the Anchor Group, which organized the meeting. In New Orleans, just four hotels carry Illy, which narrowed the field considerably, but Johnson was delighted by her final pick, Le Méridien New Orleans. The 410-room hotel has 20 meeting rooms covering more than 20,000 sf of meeting space — all, except for the Grand Ballroom, providing natural light.

"Le Méridien met Illy's exacting requirements for standards of excellence," says Johnson, "the customer service levels, their knowledge and experience working with meetings, the cleanliness throughout the hotel. One of the things that impressed me, was that everything in the hotel has something to do with New Orleans. Walking in the front door, there's a tall wall that stands two floors (high); if you look at it carefully you see it's a topographical map that shows the evolution of the levees."

Johnson appreciated how elevators take meeting guests straight from their rooms to the meeting space without having to navigate the lobby. The group took up the whole ballroom for its functions, which meant no dedicated space for breakfast. Instead, the hotel gave Illy the restaurant and made allowances for the group to dine at their convenience each morning. But there were still challenges.

"Illy doesn't do anything easy," suggests Johnson. "For them, it's not just making coffee, it's an art, and there's technical and a quality team to set up a full ensemble of equipment. These are not cheap espresso machines — they come to these meetings with a \$50,000 mac-daddy machine, and they require water, power, everything. We set it up the day before a meeting starts, break it down the day after — and once you set it up, you don't want to break it down. The hotel did really well with that."

The hotel's main ballroom served for the general session with a stage, breakout room and an awards dinner, for which a Mardi Gras theme was incorporated to bring a masquerade ball to life. By the next morning, the room was converted back for breakout sessions.

Johnson organized two events offsite — one to visit the three other hotels serving Illy and a local Illy café. The attendees were divided up for the site visits, which included entertainment, appetizers and specialty cocktails, and then regrouped for dinner at a local restaurant.

"One of Illy's main considerations is to try and make sure we immerse the team into the culture of the city," Johnson adds. "So, Illy does a community service event wherever we go. In New Orleans, we did a beautification project for a school that had lost some of its funding. We used yellow school buses and took them down to 9th Ward to plant trees. It was so inspiring, and the group loved getting their hands dirty."

### Small and Big Groups: All Are Welcome

One of the interesting aspects for New Orleans is that the city's 28,000 hotel rooms are primarily located in or close to downtown, and 85 percent of them are within walking distance of each other. Many of the hotels are smaller, boutique properties brimming with character and individuality, but with modest meeting space. But although smaller events like the one for Illycaffè are common, the city has its share of big venues as well, including the New Orleans Ernest N. Morial Convention Center, with 1.1 million sf of exhibit space.

But you can go even bigger.

For the annual convention of an insurance client last October, New Orleans-based Kuoni Destination Management was tasked with finding a venue that offered enough space to accommodate seating for a 1,600-person awards dinner as well as a custom stage with extensive lighting, video components and the ability to host a pyrotechnics finale.

Solution: The turf field of the Mercedes-Benz Superdome.

"The Superdome was chosen based on its size and the wow factor," says Denise Ferrier Mavor, CMP, Kuoni's re-



The New Orleans Ernest N. Morial Convention Center.



“New Orleans was the perfect location for these events, as it is centrally located. The majority of our participants were able to travel in on direct flights.”

**Sheila Fuzy**, President  
Fuzion Training Marketing and Communications  
Fishers, IN



gional manager of sales, central. “Being able to accommodate a 1,600-person seated dinner, along with having the turf down, created a unique experience that offered everything the client was looking for. They needed flexible space, extensive production capabilities, high-level food and beverage service, and an experienced event team that could work through the logistical requirements to ensure a successful event.”

The SMG-managed Superdome is a surprisingly busy space, especially when combined with the adjacent Smooth-

quirements, we needed to work closely with the facility to plan the logistical schedule to accommodate the production pre-rig requirements, loading dock schedules, pre-show storage space for 1,600 chairs and the pre-rig of the pyrotechnics display,” explains Ferrier Mavor. “Jennifer Cooke Talbot, Elizabeth Brown and Katherine Miller with SMG did an outstanding job of working with us to accommodate the extensive rigging points for the production and pyrotechnics needs. The teams also worked together to blend their production schedules to streamline the conflicting load-out and load-in of the two different events, along with NFL technical rehearsals for the Saints game that weekend. This coordinated effort ensured that we adhered to our timelines and completed all required inspections to produce the event.”

Centerplate is the Superdome’s catering company, and Ferrier Mavor says Justin Roux, catering manager, and Lenny Martinsen, executive chef, presented a detailed explanation of the logistics behind preparing and serving more than 1,600 meals simultaneously, as well as how the team planned to accommodate special dietary requests. “The Centerplate catering team presented a three-course gourmet meal working from four quadrant kitchens to keep service coordinated in a timely manner within our show plan.

The execution was spot-on.”

While the Awards Dinner at the Superdome was undoubtedly a highlight for the group — just stepping out onto the field under the enormous dome sets jaws agape — there were other, only-in-New-Orleans functions that the attendees will likely remember as well.

“The client had several off-property functions including transporting the 1,600 attendees on 30 Super Floats in a parade to the Fat Tuesday Extravaganza at Mardi Gras World,” recalls Ferrier Mavor. “There was an executive lunch on the stage of the historic Saenger Theater, and we had a tour program with activities ranging from swamp tours, city tours, riverboat cruises, walking tours and haunted history tours.”

“New Orleans offers such a wide variety of quality restaurants, unique event venues and outstanding entertainment options, the challenge arises in selecting just one from the many great options available,” she adds. **C&IT**



Credits: Kuoni Destination Management, USA

The Superdome’s catering team flawlessly accommodated a 1,600-person seated Awards Dinner for a unique experience.



ie King Center, an indoor arena that is home to the NBA Pelicans (and also managed by SMG). Turf events are possible outside of NFL season, August through January, but the Superdome has a variety of other event spaces to offer. These include the 45,000-sf outdoor Champions Square, which features a 60-foot-wide stage, and various indoor function rooms and club lounges.

During negotiations with the Superdome, the sales team informed Kuoni of another confirmed event set to transpire the day prior, right during setup for the client’s Awards Dinner. “Since the Awards Dinner had extensive production re-



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Spectacular sunsets make for memorable meetings at the Sanibel Harbour Resort & Spa in Fort Myers, Florida.

# Florida

## The Sunshine State Checks All the Boxes That Planners and Attendees Want and Need

By Derek Reveron

From Miami to Jacksonville and from Naples to Destin, Florida is a shining example of what planners and attendees need and want for successful meetings, incentives and events. Fortunately, the Sunshine State is developing more of everything as new-builds are in the works, and many venues are renovating and/or expanding. In addition, key destinations are improving their entertainment options, adding more exciting attractions, culinary hotspots and recreational opportunities — all the while boosting their marketing efforts.

Their efforts are paying off big time. Some destinations are setting booking and hotel occupancy records, and launching new marketing efforts to boost results even more:

- During 2016, Jacksonville's occupancy grew 4.7 percent. February 2017 was Jacksonville's 40th consecutive month of RevPAR growth, according to a report by STR.
- In 2016, Palm Beach County's number of room nights sold through groups and meetings increased a record 94 percent, according to Discover The Palm Beaches.
- During the first two months of 2017, Tampa Bay posted a record \$70.6 million in hotel revenues, up 18 percent over the previous year, according to Visit Tampa Bay. In 2016, the region recorded a 6.5 percent growth in hotel revenue.

Destinations also are racking up kudos. For example, in Southwest Florida, *Fodors.com* included Sanibel and Captiva islands on its list of America's Most Beautiful Barrier Islands. *U.S. News & World Report* named Sanibel Island one of the Top 10 family beaches in the U.S.

### Island Beauty

Sanibel is home to one of the top properties on Florida's Southwest Coast, the Sanibel Harbour Marriott Resort & Spa in Fort Myers, which recently hosted the annual Executive Conference of Rochester, Minnesota-based AgVantage Software Inc. It was the first time the two-day meeting was held

at a Florida destination, says Lori Campbell, conference manager for AgVantage.

Why did AgVantage select the Sanibel Harbour Marriott Resort & Spa? "We chose this specific resort mostly for the beautiful meeting rooms," says Campbell. "For example, the welcome reception was held in a glass octagonal room (Island Room) with a surrounding veranda during sunset. All of our breakfasts and lunches were also held in the Island Room. People could easily step outside for fresh air."

The company also used a smaller ballroom, with a tropical view of palm trees, for meetings. And guests enjoyed networking and holding discussions in the numerous spaces both indoors and outdoors.

The layout of Sanibel Harbour fit perfectly with the meeting's objectives. "Our main meeting goal is making a connection between our managers and customers," says Campbell. "A casual, laidback, relaxed atmosphere is a good place for people to make those connections and solidify those relationships. Some of our customers have been with us for 30–40 years, and we never want to take that for granted."

Top-shelf service helped attendees feel appreciated. "All of the food and beverage servers both for our group events and in the bar were especially nice and friendly," says Campbell. "The food and beverage manager was easy to work with. When the conference was over, the AV guy even helped me pack up my extra brochures and notepads that were all over the meeting space."

Attendees were encouraged to enjoy the variety of off-property activities. "We liked the idea of going during baseball spring training season to attract the baseball fans," says Campbell. "Many of us really enjoyed heading over to Sanibel Island, since it's just over the causeway from the Marriott. If you want night life, there was music every night at the hotel's bar. There are other great hotels in the area, and there's always Fort Myers Beach for more activity."



“They (The Beaches of Fort Myers and Sanibel) were fantastic to work with. They are one of the best CVBs I’ve ever worked with.”

**Lori Campbell**, Conference Manager  
AgVantage Software Inc., Rochester, MN

Since most of AgVantage’s attendees live in cold-weather cities, one activity they found particularly relaxing was seashell hunting on Sanibel Island.

The Sanibel Harbour Marriott Resort & Spa packed breakfasts to go and a trolley picked up the group early in the morning. The group arrived at the beach during low tide while the sun was rising. Afterwards, they had lunch and a tour at the Edison and Ford Winter Estates, a 21-acre botanical garden and museum adjacent to the winter homes of Henry Ford and Thomas Alva Edison.

Campbell partly credits the meeting’s success to The Beaches of Fort Myers and Sanibel, the area’s CVB. “They were fantastic to work with,” says Campbell. “I originally went on their FAM trip in November, 2015. Whenever I questioned anything throughout my planning process, I’d send an email and always get a quick reply with great resources. They are one of the best CVBs I’ve ever worked with.”

### Great Location on the Water

Resorts throughout Florida are known for their ability to provide complete attendee experiences while providing access to a wide range of nearby off-property activities. Such properties include The Vinoy Renaissance St. Petersburg Resort & Golf Club, which recently hosted a service company’s meeting for about 300 top employees from across the country.

The company chose the Vinoy Renaissance partly because of its location and meeting spaces. “It is a great hotel in a great location on the water in downtown St. Petersburg,” says the company’s planner, a CMP. “The hotel is a great fit for our programs. There is enough space for small and significantly sized

programs. The function space is broken up enough so that you can use it and be set apart from other groups.”

Proximity to offsite activities also was a factor. “There are lots of parks, restaurants and museums nearby,” says the planner. “It’s nice to have such great offsite venues within walking distance. We hosted a closing dinner at the Museum of Fine Arts. Attendees spent an hour or so strolling through the museum enjoying the collection, and then we ate dinner in the Atrium.”

The Vinoy Renaissance is so dedicated to providing the appropriate space that it acted rapidly to accommodate a last-minute change in the service company’s program.

“We had a space overlap with another group in the middle of the program, through no fault of the hotel’s but due to my program changing,” says the planner. “We had to flip a room full of exhibits to make it available for another group for a breakfast and then return the exhibits for our lunch. The hotel did a great job. Our group never noticed a thing.”

### Orlando Is No. 1

While the beach and ocean play a key role in meeting activities at coastal destinations, theme parks are a crucial part of planner itineraries in Orlando. No wonder that Orlando ranked as the No. 1 meeting destination in the U.S. for the second year in a row, according to Cvent Supplier Network, a global meetings, events and travel technology leader. Mike Graves, the COO of metroConnections, a Minneapolis-based meeting and conference management firm, says Orlando “plays a very big role as the parks are highly visible, well-known attractions with large, world-class venues, which helps attract attendance.”

Graves cites an example of a group seeking an off-property venue in Orlando that was capable of hosting a large number of attendees. “The group wanted the event to include food and beverage, entertainment and activities, a sit-down full-group general session highlighted by a live band, and a well-known keynote speaker and comedian.”

Graves proposed a partial private buyout of SeaWorld Orlando. “It allowed for ample space for food and beverage stations throughout many areas of the park, live street entertainment, bands, strolling characters, and several park attractions and rides that opened privately for attendees,” explains Graves. “In addition, we coordinated all production elements for a general session of attendees in SeaWorld’s Bayside Stadium venue.”

The variety and spaciousness of Orlando’s properties provide the opportunity for planners to be creative with group events. For example, companies can imaginatively use unique signage and branding elements to decorate spaces and build attendee loyalty and morale.

Graves cites an example: “For a large outdoor event inside a large five-day program, our team had sand sculptors put the company logo and some fun sea creatures into the sand at the resort — definitely not something everyone is used to seeing,” says Graves. “It added an element of creativity and exclusivity for the guests.”

Incentive events can be equally creative says Graves. “They can go in any direction you like — island vibe, luxury resort

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The Coca-Cola Orlando Eye is one of the newest attractions in Orlando and the largest observation wheel on the East Coast.



Credit: Visit Orlando

vibe, wildlife tours, theme park days and high-end restaurants," he says. "It truly depends on the direction your guests would most enjoy."

### Chic City Vibe

Groups seeking properties with a chic, bustling city vibe can find them in the Miami area. Kathy Miller, events manager at Kaseya, a New York City-based information technology management software provider, recently held a meeting at the 157-room Hotel Colonnade, located on the famed Miracle Mile in Coral Gables.

The group enjoyed the results of the Hotel Colonnade's recently completed \$18 million renovation, which included guest rooms and event venues as well as a new lobby bar.

"We had an annual sales kickoff meeting for 175 people for five days, all onsite," says Miller. "There were all-day meetings with food and beverages, an award ceremony and onsite dinners. This is a beautiful hotel with lots of meeting space located right downtown with easy access to the airport and Miami. Many restaurants were all within walking distance. The staff and

service is the best I have encountered. The value we received was excellent."

According to the Greater Miami Convention & Visitors Bureau, Miami is a constantly evolving global destination, providing meeting planners with exceptional options for meetings, conventions and events.

As William D. Talbert III, CDME, president and CEO of the Greater Miami Convention & Visitors Bureau, explains, "The unparalleled culture, accessibility, hotel rooms and diverse offsite venues set against a backdrop of beautiful weather and beaches are just a few of the elements that make Miami the preeminent locale for meetings and events."

"Meetings and conventions held in Greater Miami have seen record international attendance due to the ease of air access to the destination," Talbert says. "With three convention centers totaling more than 1 million sf, 75 additional meeting venues throughout the destination and more than 50,000 hotel rooms from intimate boutique hotels to luxury resorts and convention hotels, the GMCVB convention sales team is eager to be the meeting planner's onsite, one stop for assistance with every detail from start to finish," Talbert says. "Our experienced, knowledgeable team welcomes the opportunity to work with planners to identify hotels, venues, vendors and more to fulfill and exceed expectations for a highly successful meeting in Miami."

Notably, the Miami Beach Convention Center is undergoing a \$615 million renovation and expansion, which will result in a new facility perfectly designed to host large-scale business, trade, civic and cultural events. The renovation will include a mixed-use, 60,000-sf grand ballroom, 500,000 sf of exhibit space, 81 new breakout rooms spanning 190,000 sf, a 20,000-sf glass rooftop junior ballroom, advanced technology and new versatile indoor/outdoor public spaces.

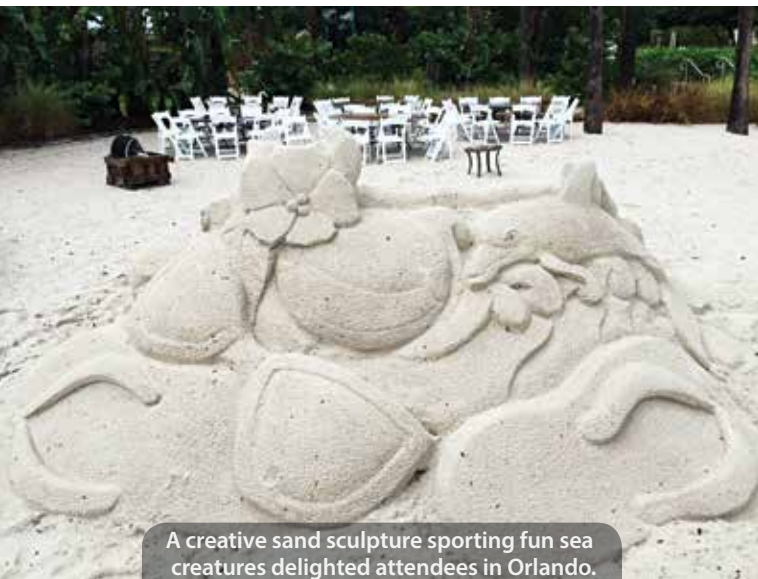
"The renovation and expansion of the Miami Beach Convention Center adds to the attraction of the destination for meeting and convention planners by offering a totally transformed state-of-the-art, technologically advanced facility with enhanced amenities, service and an extraordinary sense of place that reflects the stunning local environment, culture and community," Talbert says. "In addition, hotels such as the Loews Miami Beach, The Sheraton Miami Airport Hotel & Executive Meeting Center and The Betsy South Beach are just some of the properties that continue to cater to the meetings industry, completing multi-million-dollar renovations to their event spaces."

Here's a roundup of what's new and noteworthy throughout the Sunshine State.

### Central Florida

**Margaritaville Resort Orlando**, a waterfront destination, is set to open late this year with 187 guest rooms, 1,000 Margaritaville-themed vacation homes and 300 timeshare units. The resort also will feature a new entertainment and dining district and 12-acre waterpark.

The 1,000-room **Loews Sapphire Falls Resort at Universal**



Credit: MetroConnections

A creative sand sculpture sporting fun sea creatures delighted attendees in Orlando.



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The Trump International Beach Resort Miami boasts 22,000 sf of function space including the Ocean Ballroom, which overlooks the Atlantic Ocean.

Credit: Trump International Beach Resort Miami

**Orlando** opened last July with 115,000 sf of meeting space, a 41,000-sf ballroom, 30,000-sf hall and 16,000-sf outdoor event area. An air-conditioned bridge connects Loews Sapphire Falls meeting space to Loews Royal Pacific Resort. Both properties combined offer a total 247,000 sf of meeting space.

The **Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Resort** recently completed a comprehensive \$5 million renovation of its total 329,000 sf of meeting space at both the Swan and Dolphin properties. The makeover is part of the Swan and Dolphin's multiphase \$140 million redesign, including all 2,267 guest rooms. The Swan's guest rooms were finished in 2015. The Dolphin's rooms will be completed by the end of this year, and the \$12 million lobby redesign will be done by this fall.

Rosen Hotels is renovating its three convention properties — **Rosen Centre, Rosen Plaza and Rosen Shingle Creek**. Rosen Plaza completed renovation of its 800 guest rooms and suites, and added 3NINE, a 5,000-sf state-of-the-art entertainment venue, to its flexible indoor and outdoor event space. 3NINE together with the nearby patio, pool deck and '39 Poolside Bar & Grill can accommodate groups of up to 1,500 people.

The **Hilton Orlando Buena Vista Palace's** multimillion-dollar upscale makeover includes a redesigned lobby and guest rooms, as well as a new lobby bar and outside terrace. The renovation also includes the Float Lagoon lazy river; new pools and cabanas; and Shades, a new poolside restaurant. More than 90,000 sf of meeting space is available.

#### Northeast Florida

The **Hyatt Regency Jacksonville Riverfront** serves thousands of groups a year with 963 newly renovated guest rooms and 110,000 sf of meeting space, including 30 rooms and a 27,894-sf ballroom, the largest in Northeast Florida. More than 20,000 sf of deck space overlooks the St. Johns River. In addition to last year's multimillion-dollar renovation, Hyatt Regency Jacksonville Riverfront completed three additional upgrades

to the property, including a more contemporary front desk, a revamped Grand Ballroom and the installation of digital reader boards in multiple meeting spaces

Just 30 minutes from Jacksonville, the **Ponte Vedra Beach Resorts — the Ponte Vedra Inn & Club and The Lodge & Club** — boasts a renovated conference center featuring eight rooms that accommodate up to 350 guests and nine dining choices. Guests can enjoy a full menu of activities good for teambuilding, including golf courses, tennis, kayaking and paddleboarding.

The **Westin Daytona Beach Resort & Spa**, which will reopen this year in the former Desert Inn after a \$20 million renovation, will feature 200 guest rooms, 25,000 sf of indoor and outdoor meeting and function space, and a 5,000-sf spa. Guests are close to the Daytona Beach Convention Center, Daytona Boardwalk and the Main Street entertainment center

The **Daytona Beach Area Convention and Visitors Bureau** (DBACVB) is cranking up its marketing efforts in key markets, including Boston, Philadelphia and Chicago. The DBACVB signed race car driver Danica Patrick as a spokesperson.

#### Southeast Florida

The 360-room **Trump International Beach Resort Miami** boasts 22,000 sf of flexible meeting and function space — ideal for corporate events, teambuilding activities, meetings, training workshops, leadership seminars and executive retreats. Meeting spaces, which are bathed in natural light, include the 5,075-sf Ocean Ballroom overlooking the Atlantic, the 5,160-sf Bay Ballroom and 16 meeting rooms with floor-to-ceiling windows overlooking the ocean or bay. There are five outdoor event spaces to choose from, including on the beach, pool deck and terraces, lawn and a rooftop for small gatherings.

Trump International Beach Resort, a member of Preferred Hotels Lifestyle Collection, is independently owned by the Dezer family — real estate developers and major stakeholders in many South Florida and New York developments.

After the Trump organization acquired **Trump National Doral Miami** in 2012, the iconic 800-acre resort began an extensive top-to-bottom \$250 million renovation, which encompassed 643 guest rooms, lobby, meeting and event space, 48,000-sf spa, pool complex and restaurants. The property's four championship golf courses, including the famed Blue Monster course, were redesigned as well as the clubhouse, which features an 8,000-sf open-air veranda. The new BLT Prime opened with three private dining rooms featuring indoor and veranda seating with golf course views.

The debut of 48 Trump Spa & Suites last spring marked the official completion of the resort's restoration.

Trump National Doral's 100,000 sf of indoor function space boasts six ballrooms, three of which are brand new: the Ivanka Trump Ballroom, the White & Gold Ballroom and the Crystal Ballroom, which overlooks the Blue Monster golf course. The largest is the Donald J. Trump Grand Ballroom with 24,079 sf. Additionally there are 15 breakout rooms, five executive boardrooms, 11 meeting venues with natural lighting and a dedicated event concierge. The meeting facilities offer individual or master controls for heat/AC, telephones, multiple electrical/microphone outlets, high-density internet, with the ability to dedicate bandwidth, and special lighting effects.

There's also 75,000 sf of outdoor event spaces to take advantage of the balmy Florida climate. In a league of its own, **Eau Palm Beach Resort & Spa** is one of only six new hotels in the



Orlando "plays a very big role as the parks are highly visible, well-known attractions with large, world-class venues, which helps attract attendance."

**Mike Graves, COO**  
metroConnections, Minneapolis, MN

nation to be recognized as one of Forbes Travel Guide's 2016 Five Star Hotels. Sitting on seven Atlantic-fronted acres, the resort's commitment to "new-fashioned luxury" translates to such prime amenities as 309 guest rooms "re-envisioned" by designer Jonathan Adler, Eau Club level (private concierge, separate check-in and checkout with champagne, daily pressing service, VIP pool service and access to the club lounge), more than 30,000 sf of meeting and event space (from traditional meeting and ballrooms to poolside cabanas and Eau Spa's "Self-Centered" garden with water features and private courtyard), Forbes Five Star Eau Spa (42,000 sf with 19 treatment rooms), two outdoor oceanfront swimming pools with luxury cabanas, four restaurants and three Har-tru clay tennis courts (enhanced by an onsite pro).

Unveiled in spring 2016 is Breeze Ocean Kitchen, Eau Palm Beach Resort & Spa's latest eatery. Its cuisine "reflects the sun-



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Breeze Ocean Kitchen — Eau Palm Beach Resort & Spa's latest eatery.

splashed Palm Beach lifestyle and celebrates the Atlantic's bounteous *fruits de Mer* — all with a focus on Floridian flavors brought to life by spices, styles and preparations that infuse hints of the Caribbean, Latin America and Asia.

The 1,500-room **Fontainebleau Miami Beach** renovated its Versailles Bay View Junior Suites to match the tower's original architecture and introduced two new room categories — the Executive One-Bedroom Suite with 270-degree views of the Atlantic Ocean and Biscayne Bay, and the Grand One-Bedroom Suite.

The **Loews Miami Beach Hotel**, located in South Beach's Art Deco District, completed a \$50 million renovation that includes 790 upgraded guest rooms, and 65,000 sf of indoor and outdoor function space that accommodates up to 2,700 people. Attendees also can enjoy a new lobby experience and new pool.

The 253-room **Hyatt Regency Coral Gables** completed a four-month renovation that converted a former nightclub into the 3,711-sf Alcazaba ballroom, and refurbished all mezzanine level meeting rooms and boardrooms. More than 19,000 sf of meeting space is available.

In the Palm Beaches, the **PGA National Resort & Spa** completed a \$4 million renovation of its 33,000-sf Sports and Racquet Club. Improvements include new exercise equipment, an indoor racquetball courts, three aerobics studios and a five-lane saltwater pool. Other additions include an in-

door volleyball courts, 18 tennis courts and a spin room with video roadmapping.

The AAA Four Diamond **Palm Beach Marriott Singer Island Beach Resort & Spa** completed a \$6.8 million renovation of its meeting spaces, guest suites, lobby and dining areas.

The 86,000-sf **Warehouse District**, a sprawling new food and beverage district, will open by early 2018 in downtown West Palm Beach later this year in eight vintage-style buildings housing food and beverage vendors, artists, fitness outlets and entrepreneurs.

In Fort Lauderdale, a new dual-branded Starwood property is scheduled to open in downtown Fort Lauderdale in spring 2018. The property will be divided into two hotels: **The Element by Westin** (114 rooms) and the **Dalmar**, from the Starwood Tribute Portfolio (209 rooms). The two properties will offer a total of 323 hotel rooms, 12,000 sf of meeting and ballroom space, and a high-rise rooftop bar.

The **Conrad Fort Lauderdale Beach Resort** is scheduled to open this fall with 290 studio and suite accommodations, 20,000 sf of meeting space, four alfresco dining experiences and a 4,000-sf oceanview spa.

The **Seminole Hard Rock Hotel & Casino** in Hollywood, Florida, is building a \$1.8 billion, guitar-shaped tower that will add 800 guest rooms to the property's existing 500 guest rooms. When the project is completed by late 2019, it will add 50,000 sf of function space and new dining and entertainment venues, including the 5,500-seat, 18,000-sf arena Hard Rock Live arena.

Also in Hollywood, just south of Fort Lauderdale, **The Diplomat Beach Resort Hollywood, Curio Collection by Hilton** has completed a \$100 million dollar-transformation. From the Atlantic coast to Intracoastal, the reinvented resort pays homage to the hotel's storied past as a social hub, which began in 1958, with a modern take on design and amenities, including more than 10 new culinary concepts. As part of Curio Collection by Hilton, a global set of remarkable upper upscale hotels handpicked for their unique character, The Diplomat Beach



A view of the golf course at the Naples Beach Hotel & Golf Club at sunrise.

Credit: Naples Beach Hotel & Golf Club

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An al fresco event setup at the Sundial Beach Resort & Spa on Sanibel Island.

Credit: Sundial Beach Resort & Spa

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### Southwest Florida

The **Wyndham Grand Clearwater Beach** opened this year with 343 rooms facing either the ocean or Intracoastal Waterway. Housed in two towers, the Wyndham offers more than 22,000 sf of meeting and function space, including the largest ballroom in Pinellas County.

By this fall, Clearwater will get a \$100 million, 166-room **JW Marriott** luxury hotel on space once occupied by DreamView Resort. Thirty-six one-, two- and three-bedroom furnished JW Marriott Residences ranging from 850 to 1,350 sf will occupy four upper floors. The JW Marriott will be Tampa Bay's first five-star hotel.

Another new Clearwater property **The Opal Sands Resort** opened with 230 guest rooms, 17,000 sf of waterfront meeting space, the elegant Opal Ballroom and breakout spaces with Gulf views. Opal Sands is ideal for indoor and beach events, as well as networking and teambuilding activities.

**The Hyatt Place Downtown** will open later this year as a condo-hotel in the former Plaza Beach Hotel after it undergoes renovation. The Hyatt Place will occupy 13 stories of the building's 41 stories and feature 175 guest rooms and 253 condominiums. The new property will offer 17,000 sf of indoor and outdoor event space, including a 7,650-sf ballroom, a 3,366-sf event lawn, and 9 breakout rooms.

**The Naples Grande Beach Resort** completed an \$18 million renovation that includes an enhanced lobby lounge and Vista Ballroom, new guest room décor, and a new restaurant, Catch of the Pelican. The property offers 83,000 sf of meeting space, five restaurants, three heated pools and fitness center.

On Marco Island, **The JW Marriott Marco Island Beach Resort** has completed an extensive \$320 million renovation. This fall, the JW Marriott Marco Island Beach Resort will unveil a 12,000-sf indoor entertainment center and a 94-room, adults-only tower with a restaurant and rooftop pool. The 726-room resort offers 100,000 sf of meeting space.

This fall, the **Hilton Marco Island Beach Resort & Spa** will debut its redesigned 5,200-sf Grand Ballroom and a beachfront event lawn. The improvements follow a \$40 million renovation that includes new luxury family suites, a newly designed pool and the remodeled indoor and outdoor deck at 560 Bar & Restaurant.

On the barrier island of Sanibel, **Sundial Beach Resort & Spa** is a unique tropical island destination with miles of shell-strewn beaches. Directly onsite are restaurants and shops with panoramic views of the Gulf of Mexico. The resort features conference facilities with more than 12,000 sf of meeting space.

Following the popularity of its Japanese Steakhouse, Sundial Beach Resort & Spa has unveiled a new sushi-inspired takeout market located in its main lobby. Shima Grab N Go fuses the healthful benefits and delicious taste of fresh sushi with the convenience of to-go ordering. Sundial's Shima Japanese Steakhouse & Sushi Bar was named 2016's Best New Restaurant and Best Sushi; the new Grab N Go market carries a full line of the same award-winning sushi.

The resort recently completed a 12-court Pickleball stadium. The Plexicushion system courts provide tournament-grade facilities in a beautiful, waterfront setting accessible to both resort guests and the public. A combination of tennis, badminton and table tennis, pickleball now claims the title of "fastest growing sport in North America." Suitable for all ages and skill levels, the sport is a game of shot placement rather than strength and may be played at a leisurely pace or highly competitive tournament level.

Additional amenities include HydroGrid tennis courts, multiple heated swimming pools, a state-of-the-art fitness center, Kay Casperson Lifestyle Spa & Boutique, Sanibel Sea School at Sundial, Bailey's Marketplace and much more.

### Northwest Florida

**The Henderson**, a Salamander Beach & Spa Resort, opened in November. Nestled next to the 208-acre Henderson Beach State Park, the Henderson is the perfect destination for groups seeking a range of outdoor and teambuilding activities, including kayaking, jet-skiing, charter boat fishing, scuba and parasailing. The 170-room Henderson offers 30,000 sf of indoor and outdoor event space.

Another luxurious property **The Hilton Sandestin Beach Golf Resort & Spa** has it all, including more than 40,000 sf of award-winning flexible meeting space that accommodates groups ranging from 10 to 2,000 attendees. Meeting space includes spacious ballrooms, breakout rooms, prefunction spaces, an elegant boardroom, hospitality suites and a theater.

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On The Move



**Juan R. Vicioso Jr.** was named director of sales and marketing for The Hel-drich, a Benchmark Resorts & Hotels property in New Brunswick, New Jersey. He formerly was director of catering and convention services for the W New York and associate director of catering for The Westin Times Square.

JW Marriott Austin has welcomed **Jay Spurr** back to Austin as the market director of sales and marketing. He previously served as the director of sales and marketing for JW Marriott Austin from 2011-2015. He most recently was director of sales and marketing for the San Francisco Marriott Marquis.

**Brian Lang** was named director of sales and marketing at Hyatt Regency Denver at Colorado Convention Center and Grand Hyatt Denver. He was director of sales, marketing and events at Hyatt Regency Lake Tahoe Resort, Spa and Casino.

Palace Resorts has announced the addition of **Michaela Foley**, director of sales for the Northeast region and **Lisa Josoff**, director of sales for the Midwest region. Foley was area director of group sales for SLS Park Avenue and The Redbury New York. Josoff was global account manager for Starwood Hotels & Resorts.

Atlantis, Paradise Island in The Bahamas has named **Jim Curtis** as vice president of group sales. With more than 30 years of hospitality sales and marketing experience, he most recently served as director of sales and marketing for The Diplomat Beach Resort in Hollywood, Florida.

The Sheraton New York Times Square Hotel has promoted **Leon Goldberg** to complex director of sales and marketing for both the Sheraton New York Times Square and the New York Marriott Marquis. He has been the director of sales and marketing at the New York Marriott Marquis for 10 years. **C&IT**

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